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AND THEIR PECULIARITIES.

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WORD GOSSIP:

A SERIES OF FAMILIAR ESSAYS

ON

WORDS AND THEIR PECULIARITIES.

BY THE

REV. W. L. BLACKLEY, M.A.

RECTOR OF NORTH WALTHAM, HANTS.

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PREFACE.

THE KIND RECEPTION accorded to the matter of the following pages on its appearance this year in successive numbers of the 'Churchman's Shilling Magazine,' has induced me to republish it in a collected form. My little book pretends to no higher character than its title implies—Gossip; if it succeed in conveying to my indulgent readers a little of the pleasure that ordinary gossip seems to do, I shall feel more than satisfied with the result of my labours.

W. LEWERY BLACKLEY.

NORTH WALTHAM RECTORY: *Dec.* 1868.

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WORD GOSSIP.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE PLAN and purpose of the following pages will be best understood by the ordinary meaning of the title I have prefixed. They are meant to form no special systematic treatise on words and their peculiarities, but merely, if possible, to set forth here and there, in a form pretending to no depth of learning and to no authority of teaching, some points of interest connected with language in general, and our own language in particular, which it is hoped may prove attractive to ordinary readers. I have endeavoured to avoid, on the one hand, too dry and deep, on the other, too superficial and conjectural, a method of treatment, and have prefixed the title of 'Gossip' in the hope that the very notion of homeliness and sociability which is attached to the word may meet the objections which

some 'stern critics' might feel disposed to take to a set of essays on words, filled with digressions and familiarities of various sorts, which at first sight may seem not closely enough connected with the subject in hand.

Gossip would be no gossip if it were all didactic and dry—unprofitable gossip if altogether light and trifling. My aim has been, and will be, so far as possible, to say what I have to say of things which may be instructive in such a way as may also be interesting; and to 'bandy words' with my kindly readers as I might do some rainy day beside my study fire with a congenial friend. Of course I shall find many to disagree with my statements, and to question my deductions. Why should they not? Who shall limit any man's exercise of the great and glorious 'right to differ'? Would life really be worth having if there were no contradictions? And who need write books if all men were of one mind? But I will at least promise my readers that they shall neither find me dictatorial in my statements, nor so bigoted to my own opinions as to hold myself above correction. If I offer them the rough quartz of my own digging, I shall rejoice if they extract the gold, even though they crush the ore to do so.

It has often been my lot, in preaching to a rustic congregation, to be told by my hearers, by

unmistakeable outward signs which every preacher ought to be quick to recognise, that I have been running too long in one groove. On such occasions I generally use at the end of my period the cabalistic formula, 'Now, I am going to tell you a story.' It is like the adjutant's cry of ''ttention!' to the regiment standing at ease; it is the unfailing 'Open sesame' to blinking eyes; it acts as the sound of Blucher's guns at Waterloo, and gives the victory at once to virtue and wakefulness in those struggling hearers whose whole reserve of vital power has been engaged by nature in the huge effort of digesting their one weekly dinner worthy of the name. Of course my sermon story must have a meaning. Even so I will tell a little story now to my readers, with whom I wish to start on good terms, but who may be already inclined to yawn over my egotistical introduction.

My father had a schoolfellow, whose name, for all I know, may have been just as well Gonzalvo Guicciardini as Bob Brown, which latter, however, I will call him by 'for short.' This was a lad of such appalling conscientiousness that nothing could induce him to make an unqualified statement of fact, lest in some unintentional way he might be found to have uttered a falsehood. Some companions one day, in order to get an absolute assertion out of him, made the following experiment. They

offered him a wine glass, saying, 'Now, Bob Brown, take this wine glass in your hand, and say, "Upon my word of honour, I have this wine glass in my hand."' With imperturbable solemnity Bob took the glass, and slowly said, 'Upon my word of honour, I have this wine glass in my hand, *I think!*' Just as Bob with his wine glass am I with my words. He had a strong belief in the correctness of his view, but left a loop-hole for escape in case of possible error. So do I with my derivations; *I think* they are right, but I will not for a moment say it is impossible they, or some of them, may be wrong.

CHAPTER II.

ON WORD-HUNTING IN GENERAL.

That the wise man acquires with each access of learning an increase, at least, of one special sort of knowledge, that, namely, of his own ignorance, is a remark which the student of language must find continually justified as his experience grows. The marvellous advances which linguistic studies have made of late years, and the wide field which has been opened to the labours of the conscientious enquirer, have awakened enough interest in such matters to render some slight acquaintance with the general subject of linguistics almost a requisite in circles of average education. Who, for instance, now-a-days spends a week in a country house, without finding at least one or two occasions when the general appalling dulness of ordinary conversation becomes enlivened by some controversy as to the force of a word, the meaning of a custom, or the origin of a phrase or proverb? And who has not noted the interest with which such subjects are

pursued, even when not one of the parties to the controversy is qualified by study or experience to do more than hazard a conjecture or guess at an interpretation ? We do not mean to say that every one to be met on such occasions is either sufficiently capable, willing, or rash to enter personally into the discussion; but they generally can and do attend to its course and scope with a certain sort of uninstructed pleasure, like that with which the uninitiated look upon the huntsman's casting of his hounds, or watch the intricacies of backing-up at cricket, or count the numbers as they are scored upon the billiard-marking board. To be sure, the occasions for linguistic talk are limited. Breakfast time is a bad time for it; half the people have letters to read; and the unlettered remainder are too watchful of their chance for the laid-down newspaper, or too attentive to the horrid man who *will* skim it of its cream by ejaculating telegraphic headings, to mind even Max Müller if he began to lecture, or Professor Whitney if he began to criticise him. And if breakfast be a bad time, dinner is a worse one; the sympathizers rarely are within reach of each other; a solemn ceremony is going on which must be attended to; the great British sacrifice to high appetite must be gravely approached and regularly consummated; certain viands must be accepted and certain others

declined; certain wines drunk at one moment, and refused the next; any error in doing which may make your neighbour doubt of your style, and in such case scout your disquisitions, were they such as professors would praise and publishers scramble for. Certain attentions must be paid to the lady on your right, or woe betide the female estimate of your otherwise brilliant conversational powers, when your late neighbour talks of you up-stairs in the drawing-room, with her hand on the mantelpiece and her foot on the fender, the remembrance of boredom in her heart, and the awful verdict dropping from her lips, 'Humph! hadn't much to say for himself; rather a dull specimen!' The British dinner is too dovetailed an assembly for the etymologist to expect attention from. The fox-hunters predominate there; if they choose they may unearth the ghost of poor Reynard killed in the morning; they can view him at soup, check for champagne, and run in to him triumphantly by the time the little bits of cheese are handed round. But the poor word-hunter may just as well strangle his little bag-fox at once as turn him down for sport. There's not even a tally-ho! he's mobbed in a moment. The British dinner is no time for linguistics. And how about other hours between the meals? Equally vain! People (male or female) hunt in couples then, and only scholars can enjoy

linguistics *tête-à-tête* ; so, after all, there is but one good season in the day for such a topic ; but, to make amends, it flourishes then. At luncheon time, that delightful meal, one of whose synonyms—'snack'—means in Low German simply 'chat,'—when other interests flag and appetites are moderate ; when you can sit a moment without your plate being snatched away, and listen a moment without a servant's interruption ; when the parson has dropped in on one side, perhaps, leavened with Greek and Latin, and the ladies have some French, and the younger ones some German, and the young men believe it the thing to nod as if they had read or heard Lectures on the Science of Language, and their sisters without any nodding have really read and liked such books as 'Trench upon Words,'—then I say, at this blissful free-and-easy luncheon time let the astute word-hunter slip his fox. Away he goes, and all the field, to carry on the figure, are off in the pursuit ; some shouting loudly when they should be silent, some shyly silent when they might vociferate, some with firm-seated attention resolved to see it out, but all going and meaning going. And if the fox be game, if the word be one really interesting, how wide and sweeping is the chase. The hunters vying, each select the trophy they desire as the reward of their pursuit. Prefix and suffix form poor Reynard's pate and brush !

nay, so accurately does the parallel hold good, that the huntsman may suggest to the first whip, as the merry chase goes on, that *vermin* and *verbum* must at least be cognate terms. They hunt him to his last lodging; earth after earth he tries, but finds no harbour; from county to county, from land to land, from continent to continent, they follow their failing quarry. The labourers in the fields they pass make signs and shout to guide the hot pursuit; Kelt, Norseman, Briton, Saxon, Gaul, Lett, Finn, and Provençal, stand on each rising ground to telegraph his track, till, worn by long fatigue to a mere limping shadow of his former self, he goes to ground, at home at last, amidst the hills of Hindostan.

In truth, the philologist's hobby-horse is a strong goer that trifles never balk. To him the British Channel is a surface drain, the Alps and Apennines mere posts and rails, the Mediterranean a simple brook, and the Himalayas only an outlying cover. And surely in racketing over such a wide expanse through all the season, which means all his life, that hobby's rider must have many a happy day and see a deal of country. Seriously, to drop this very horsy metaphor, the student of words enters upon a pursuit the pleasures of which no merely worldly study can outrival, and stores with every day he lives, with almost every sentence he hears, resources

for continual enjoyment. And if in the remarks which follow I seem to bear too hardly on the rashly expressed results of merely superficial observation, or hasty conjecture, I would have it borne in mind that it is not the fact of observation however superficial, or of conjecture however hasty, that I condemn, but only their rash and unprofitable expression. For the conjectural stage of linguistic enquiry *must be passed through by every student.* He can never learn to swim without venturing into the water; and floundering along with one foot on the ground, though it be not exactly swimming, may teach him at least to strike out with his arms. And it is in fact only the observation of derivations which he either sees as being obvious or guesses at as being probable, which gives him any taste for the pursuit. Let me in all humility quote my own experience to illustrate my meaning. As a very little boy, walking with my father, the fact of a woman curtseying to him as she passed, set me on enquiring the derivation of the word *curtsey.* Knowing no better, I made myself an adverb *curtè, shortly*, from the Latin adjective *curtus*, referring the *sey* to Latin *sedere, to sit*; and was very satisfied with my conjecture, as explaining the gesture to be an abridgment of sitting, till my father upset it at once by pointing out the fact of the word *curtsey* being compressed

from *courtesy*, and consequently referable to the root of *court*. The very consideration of the two derivations proved of interest, and tended to encourage the taste for such investigations. In fact, to the uninstructed beginner, conjecture alone can awake an interest in the matter, and point the way to study as the means of reaching fuller and more accurate results. It is exactly so with other pursuits, such for example as those of music and the fine arts, and it might be so with the acquirement of Greek and Latin, did not blind custom make our teachers universally begin at the wrong end, cramming young brains with undeveloped grammatical results before they can comprehend grammatical relations. There is no question, that a child hearing a sonata of Beethoven played, and followed by 'Pop goes the Weasel,' will prefer the latter performance, which seems an abomination to the more instructed ear; in the same way that, further on in life, as the ear becomes educated, the true lover of music infallibly transfers his admiration from Italian melody to German harmony; but without passing through such phases the materials for comparison between the lowest and the highest degrees of musical excellence would be wanting.

So it is in art. The child who draws what he really thinks a portrait of his dear papa, represent-

ing him as an agonizing figure of 8 supported on lucifer matches, and brandishing two frantic toasting-forks for arms, must pass through some such phase as this before he can become conscious of any taste or liking for drawing. The errors are only seen by degrees, and the correction of each, as discovered, marks a new step gained in the way to excellence ; and this brings me back to the text with which I started, only placed in another form. The wise man learns his own ignorance, and knowledge of his ignorance increases his wisdom. It may be that some of my readers know the town of Dusseldorf, that metropolis of painting, and Schulte's ' Permanente Ausstellung,' or exhibition of paintings, in which nearly all the pictures which leave the easels of the three hundred and odd artists in the place appear for at least two or three days before being sent to other exhibitions, or to the patrons by whom they have been commissioned. Such readers may remember the name and works of Wessel. 'Hujus magnum nomen fuit' about the year of grace 1860 ; not as a great painter, for mortal man probably never saw anything so ridiculous as the so-called paintings he exhibited ; they formed topics of endless amusement when they appeared, and attracted many spectators by the fame of their badness who would have felt but little pleasure in, or appreciation of, the noblest

works of Achenbach or Lessing. The man knew nought of painting, nought of drawing, but he insisted on his crude ideas, monstrously absurd as they were, being exhibited ; and the result was, as might have been predicted, that he was looked upon as an utter lunatic. He could see no fault in his productions ; he had been, if I mistake not, a waiter in an hotel before the frenzy filled his mind that he was born to be an artist, and the fearful daubs he put before the public were the result of total want of education. His eye had not learnt to see or to compare objects, and to observe the differences, wide though they were, between the models he copied and his own imitations. Now, would it have been right to blame this poor crazed man for painting ? would it have been right or reasonable to take his easel and his pencils from his hands, and thus destroy his pleasure, and disturb his peace ? Assuredly not ; such an idea could scarcely enter any reasonable brain ; but it certainly would have been well to prevent the exposure of his astounding ignorance, and to have sanctioned the appearance of no more of his productions before a critical public till he could see things at least with an eye able to protect him from attempting impossibilities. It is just thus that the work of superficial observers in linguistics should be treated. They should not be told, as now

and then an impatient student may tell them, that they have nought to do with words; their interest in, and awakening taste for, a delightful study, is not to be discouraged and ridiculed, but they should be counselled to dig below the surface. Their observation is not to be blamed, but its superficiality is. The work of the cleverest engineer in opening a coal mine must begin at the surface, must be superficial, somewhere or other; but if he wants to make his toil profitable, he must go thence deeper and deeper. So he strikes new strata, and taps new veins, while others may be content with gathering the useless slag and clinker which has been burnt at the pit's mouth. So it is with the investigation of words. It is the rarest thing to find any novelty whatever even in the most accurate guesses of the superficial linguist; and they are often as annoying to the real student as the novel announcement might be to a real historian that 'Queen Anne was dead.'

CHAPTER III.

COMMON ERRORS AS TO DERIVATION.

THE word *guess*, in my last paragraph, suggests for consideration the grand erroneous notion of derivation which is most generally entertained. It is this, that similarity in sound, similarity in sense, or similarity in application, discovered as existing between two words, either in the same or different languages, is sufficient to establish the fact of one of the words in question being either cognate or affiliated to the other.

And this brings me to notice, in passing, another common error as to derivation; I mean that of carelessness in distinguishing *kinship* of words from *descent*. How often people presume, just because Homer wrote before the birth of Latin literature, that the Latin language is a daughter of the Greek, and that similar or identical words occurring in both languages must of necessity be of Greek descent; without remembering that even in the

days of Homer men lived in Italy, who must have had a language. Much in the same way we find it said of such and such an English word,—'Oh! it comes from the German,' as if that were its conclusive pedigree. The distinction between *affinity* and *derivation* is so little attended to, that many, in speaking of languages and words, make the same error as one might who, speaking of a family of sisters differing in age, considered the eldest mother of the second, the second of the third, and so on to the end. In fact, the fraternal relationship of language is loosely spoken of as the filial, and men imagine continually that they have discovered an origin where in fact they have only lighted upon an analogy.

But this distinction between *cognate* and *derived* words is only by the way. The grand error in common notions of derivation, as I have said, lies in regarding a resemblance, which may be casual, between two words, as a necessary proof of common origin.

That such resemblance is a *presumption* of their common origin is unquestionably true; and in many, nay, in innumerable cases, the presumption may be strong enough to amount to a demonstration; but this is far from sufficient to establish anything like a rule referable to all cases; and the neglect of this distinction leads to much confusion.

I need make no excuse for transcribing here some apposite remarks on this subject from the pen of Professor Max Müller, for the matter of whose labours in the linguistic field students of language can hardly be more indebted than ordinary readers are for their manner:—'It does happen now and then that in languages, whether related to each other or not, certain words appear of identically the same sound, and with some similarity of meaning. These words, which former etymologists seized upon as most confirmatory of their views, are now looked upon with well-founded mistrust. Attempts for instance are frequently made at comparing Hebrew words with the words of Semitic languages. If this is done with a proper regard to the immense distance which separates the Semitic from the Aryan languages, it deserves the highest credit. But if, instead of being satisfied with pointing out faint coincidences in the lowest and most general elements of speech, scholars imagine they can discover isolated cases of minute coincidence amidst the general disparity in the grammar and dictionary of the Aryan and Semitic families of speech, their attempts become unscientific and reprehensible.'*

* Max Müller, Lectures on Science of Language, Series II., p. 282.

And again in the same lecture,*—'Sound etymology has nothing to do with sound. We know words to be of the same origin which have not a single letter in common, and which differ in meaning as much as black and white.' (By the way, this phrase, accidentally used, is a good illustration of the statement, the word *black*, if its common derivation be received, coming from a word signifying *pale.*) '*Mere guesses, however plausible, are completely discarded from the province of scientific etymology.* . . . A derivation, even though it be true, is of no real value if it cannot be proved—a case which happens not unfrequently.'

Let me give an instance or two of this conjectural etymology. A very distinguished scholar and author thus derives the word *vouchsafe.* He makes it part of a French phrase, 'Veux, sauf ton honneur, me permettre,' &c. 'Deign, saving your honour, to permit me,' &c.; thus implying wherever the word is used the astonishing ellipsis of the words 'your honour,' or some such equivalent; and implying further, that the fulfilment of such a request as is here presumed must in any case be supposed capable of compromising the honour of the person entreated. This already is a hard strain on our belief, and looking further into it, and seeing that such a

* Lect. VI. p. 243.

derivation would bring the word from the Latin *velle*, instead of from *vovere*, altering entirely the sense of the word, we feel no difficulty in condemning the conjecture as faulty and frivolous. The word is in fact, as the dictionaries rightly have it, referable to *vow* or vouch, either in the form of an active verb with an ellipsis of the object, *vow* (me, him, &c.) *safe*, that is, give a warrant or safe conduct (in the same way as we ask *to be borne* harmless), or as a neuter verb, *vow safe*, that is, *warrant surely*, which is the first and natural sense of the expression. How it has reached its secondary meaning, *condescend*, is a matter with which we are not here concerned.

I have purposely adduced this instance of faulty conjecture overlooking obvious derivation, as affording a sort of extreme example of the errors into which guesses, unsupported by proof, may lead generally well-informed students.

Let me take a different case. I mean the word tally-ho! For this a writer in 'Notes and Queries' suggests the French derivation, *au taillis*,—literally *to the copse*. The very use of the word might have shown the absurdity of such a suggestion. It is only when the fox has 'gone away' from cover (or taillis) that even a Cockney would dream of raising his tally-ho at all. Woe betide his hunting character for ever if guilty of such an atrocious

crime; and, therefore, to suppose that when Reynard is gone the sportsman should be summoned *into* cover, can only be a rational guess on the supposition that fox-hunting and donkey-racing are conducted on similar principles. This is a fine example of the need of proof to establish conjecture. The author of this explanation should at least have examined the French terms of chase before airing his suggestion. I happen to possess an old French book 'Le parfait chasseur,'* in which, strangely enough, the origin of the cry is found not under the head of fox-hunting, but as belonging to the pursuit of the stag! I quote the following passage from page 8:—'Quand le Veneur a recu l'ordre de frapper aux briseés, il prend son limier et marche devant toute la troupe droit à sa brisée, et pousse ses voies jusqu'au lancer; puis il sonne deux ou trois coups de trompe quand il a lancé son cerf. Si quelqu'un le voit, il crie *ta-hiau*, et l'on donne les chiens.'

Here we have the exact word in sense and sound; whatever its origin, and however singular the fact that we spell it with the double *l*, which the French pronounce exactly as in the words *ta-hiau*, it is manifest that the derivation *au taillis* was never imagined for it in the very country whence

* Par M. de Selincourt, Paris, 1683.

the correspondent of *Notes and Queries* would deduce it, though the term exists there as an established hunting-cry, with the very meaning in which it echoes all over England for seven months in the year.

Again, how plausible is the conjecture that the word *pin* is derivable from *pinus*, a pine tree, rather than from *spina*, a thorn. In the first place, the form both of the word and the thing it expresses is far more similar to that of the former than that of the latter word; and in the second, we find a striking analogy in an independent language. In German the word *pin* is expressed by a particularisation of the general term *nadel*, a needle; the form being *steck-nadel*, a needle which remains in its place, as contradistinguished from one which is removed as soon as its object of carrying a thread through the orifice it makes is accomplished, (the prefix *steck*, if meaning merely perforation, while suggesting no distinction, since a needle perforates as well as a pin, would more properly be *stech*). Now the Germans actually apply the word *nadel* to what we call the *needles* of trees of the *pine* tribe, as distinguished from the *leaves* of other trees; and they further classify *pine* timber in general as *nadel-holz*, needle-wood. Yet a little examination shows how, in spite of these analogies of form and of application, the

word *pin* must come through the less similar *spina*, from the still less similar *spica*, which supplies us also with our word *spike* in another sense. In Virgil's description of the squalid Achemenides in the third book of the Æneid, we read that his tattered covering (like that, if I mistake not, of Robinson Crusoe, friend of our youth) was held together by *thorns*, 'consertum tegumen *spinis*.' And there is no reason why the word *pine* might not have been used instead, were such a sense customary, since both Virgil's metre would have admitted it, and Achemenides' circumstances would have been in keeping with such use, for we are actually told he was in a pine-bearing country in the description of the pursuing Cyclops, who used a pine stem as his walking stick.

'Trunca manum pinus regit, et vestigia firmat.'

Ovid,* moreover, referring to Virgil's account of Achemenides, speaks of him when his squalor is past, and when in the matter of raiment he is what an Irishman would call 'smooth' once more—

'Talia quærenti jam non hirsutus amictu,
Jam suus, et spinis conserto tegmine nullis,
Fatur Achemenides ——'

* Metam. xiv. 165, 166.

And Tacitus,* describing the attire of the Germans, says,—

'Tegumen omnibus sagum, fibula, aut, si desit, spina consertum.'

'The universal covering is a blanket, fastened by a brooch, or failing this, by a thorn.'

These instances, to say nothing of the French word *épingle*, which in its earlier form, *espingle*, exhibits the initial *s* of spina, are entirely conclusive on the point in debate.

Again, with reference to the derivation of the word *umpire* conjectural etymology has been very busy; and in this case we find a really conscientious and laborious student tempted into a guess which can hardly be considered satisfactory. I mean that given by Mr. Hensleigh Wedgwood;† though, as might be expected from so accurate a scholar, he adduces evidence, which to himself is manifestly conclusive, of the correctness of his view. He says,—'the old spelling *nompeyr* (Piers Ploughman's Vision, ii. 107), leaves no room for doubt that this word comes from the old French *nompair*,‡ uneven, odd.' This seems, however, to admit of much doubt; while another origin,

* Tac. Germ. xiv.

† Philological Soc. Proceedings, 1846–48, p. 151.

‡ For *non pair*.

imperium, *command*, which Webster gives, is a truly miserable guess. Were we to accept *nonpair* as the origin of the word, we should be taking a simple adjective as expressing a special personage, a course which, however necessary in cases where we can do no better, seems very objectionable if we can find a substantive existing in the word. The initial *n*, in the instance adduced, is manifestly as exceptional as that in the word *nunkle* occurring in Shakspeare for *uncle*, and is occasioned most probably by an original agglomeration of the *n* from the article *an* before the vowel of *ompair*; much in the same way as we say *alligator* for *a lagarto* (lizard). That *m* is sometimes convertible to *n* is indeed unquestionable, but only again under urgent necessity, and the expression *non-pair* would be very exceptional in a language which has the Latin *impar* in the form *unfair*,—the last quality to be desired in a referee. It therefore appears more probable that the word, which, as I have said, implies a *person*, is formed of the French substantive *homme*, man, and *pair*, equal, and signifies *the impartial man*, in exactly the same way as we find the referee called upon continually in German students' duels by the epithet *Unparteiischer*. I may add, as strong confirmation of this view, that it was suggested to me by observing how in cricket matches, in that part of West

Surrey where I then lived, the *umpire* (as we pronounce the name) is invariably styled the *umpeer*, and the fact of our having the word *peer*, as equivalent to the French *pair*, showed me how obviously the former part of umpire was referable to the French word *homme*.

The examination of this word tempts me, in spite of my own warnings against conjectural and unevidenced etymologies, to venture the suggestion that our word *fair*, in the sense of *just*, and also perhaps in the sense of *beautiful* (apart from having light hair,) comes from the same root, through the primary notion of *evenness*, equality of proportion, *regular* features being still considered all but indispensable to beauty.

Another very common error as to derivation lies in suggesting the name of some supposed or real place or person as the origin of a word. This in very many cases is committed by observers of the entirely superficial class, by the etymological butterfly rather than the etymological bee. So we hear such extravagances as assigning *gambado* to the name of an imaginary riding-master, while the true meaning is something adapted to the leg,* from Italian *gamba*, *the shin* (as used in *viol di gamba*, *leg-fiddle*, violoncello); the source, by the

* Compare our own words, *leg*, *leggings*.

way, of our words *ham* and *gammon* (of bacon), which latter again I have heard absurdly assigned as the etymon of *gammon* in the sense of *hoaxing*, as one speaks of a *rich* joke, or as schoolboys talk of a *fat* piece of fun; the simple meaning of *making game*, from the Saxon *gamen* (as in *back-gammon*, *game of the trough*), being entirely overlooked.

So *Notes and Queries* records a brilliant guess originated by lighting on the mention of a cook named Brawn in Dr. King's writings. This, unsupported by any sort of evidence, rational or contextual, is sufficient to persuade a conjecturer that this Soyer of the time conferred his 'magnum et venerabile nomen' on that excellent viand with which witless Wamba routed poor Isaac of York at the tournament. But *brawn* means distinctively the meat of a *boar* (boaren), and, properly speaking, is applied to the thick portion of the boar cut from the shoulders and neck. Wamba's 'shield of brawn' accurately describes its shape, as also the modern expression *collar of brawn* fixes its anatomical position, though a misapprehension or wrong conjecture as to the force of the word *collar* has led to the cook's idea of serving brawn with a frilled collar round it; while this mistake again has led the carvers of brawn to another notion, and, the collar being supposed worn to enable the carver to grasp the brawn with

his hand, it has been held necessary to do so, and subversive of all order to touch the sacred circle with a fork.

Take again the word *till* for a money-drawer. Mr. Timbs, the author of 'Club Life of London,' in describing the end of the once celebrated 'Tom's coffee-house,' says:—'The coffee-house business closed in 1814, about which time the premises were first occupied by Mr. William Till, the famous numismatist.' Here, it may be supposed, is an admirable derivation for the word *till* from a personal name. But a little examination of word-history disproves the accuracy of this inviting conjecture. Mr. William Till, as a coin collector, was appropriately named; but he collected in 1814, while the word 'till, a drawer in a counter or desk,' is to be found in Bailey's Dictionary of 1742, and probably in far earlier ones, since it is derived from an Anglo-Saxon word *dille* (equivalent to German *theil*, a part), and meaning a division or compartment.

The same historical argument demolishes the absurd derivation of *brawn* from a cook so named. Dr. King wrote his 'Art of Cookery' in the early part of the last century; but the word *brawn* is centuries older, and to be found in the prayer-book version of the 119th Psalm, ver. 70:—'Their heart is as fat as *brawn*, but my delight hath been in thy

law.' The prayer-book version, as most are aware, dates from 1539, being that of the great English Bible of Tyndal and Coverdale; and it is interesting to see how the later translation of the authorised version has dropped out the old word, giving instead, 'Their heart is as fat as *grease*.'

Another illustration of the error of deducing words from individual or imagined names appears in the explanation commonly given of the word *martinet*. It signifies in English a vexatiously strict commanding officer, and is altogether a military term. It is therefore alleged to be the name of some departed colonel named Martinet, who has thus for ever stamped the name he bore upon the character he gained. But *martinet* in the Swiss superstition means the spirit of mischief, the malicious sprite, the bugbear, and in this sense is mentioned by Victor Hugo ('Toilers of the Sea,' vol. i.) when setting forth how every country has at least its tradition of some such ill-conditioned Loki. And a special reason why such a Swiss word should have this extensive military sense to-day may be found in the fact that for so many centuries and in so many countries Swiss mercenaries formed a part of almost every European army.

It is undoubtedly true that individual names have now and then been perpetuated in the

manner here censured; but if so, we find almost universally that there is some good and distinct historic proof of the fact; and if such proof be not adducible, we can scarcely go wrong in scouting the derivation proposed. When we are told that the word *simony*, by which we mean corrupt trafficking in church preferment, is derived from Simon Magus, the explanation and testimony afforded by his history recorded in the Acts of the Apostles give convincing proof of the accuracy of the derivation. So we know the origin of Davenport, D'Oyley, Macadamize, Brougham, and Clarence. So we know that to 'burke an enquiry' means to silence it, in figurative allusion to the murderer Burke, who, to provide bodies for the surgeons, used to murder his victims by covering their mouths with a pitch plaster. But other such instances are rare. In fact, these nominal derivations hardly ever have any sort of reasonable ground for their support. One such term, however, seems now to have got a firm footing in our language, the explanation of which may possibly in course of time be lost. It is that most euphonious periphrasis in which the bloodthirsty ogre of the lodging-house bed is denominated a 'Norfolk Howard.' Here a very noble name is assigned to a very ignoble insect, with what seems likely to be a permanent, if unpleasant, association, and the

manner in which it has come about may be worth recording.

A few years ago a Welsh gentleman altered his name; the lieutenant of his county, denying his right to do so, refused to address him by his new style in official correspondence. Considerable debate arose on the subject, and, the question being brought before a court of law, it was held that there was nothing illegal in the change of name effected. The decision was given the day before the Derby day. The *Times* on the day after the Derby day inserted a leading article on the subject of the right of changing names; the writer of that article went to the Derby, and, doubtless knowing what the subject of his night's writing was to be, had it frequently present in his mind. In Epsom he noticed an innkeeper's name posted up as Joshua Bugg—truly an ominous epithet for one of his calling,—and the *Times*' writer in his article cited this extraordimary patronymic as an example both of a name needing change, and of its owner's right to change it. The article declared that as far as legality was concerned 'Mr. Joshua Bugg might take the name of Norfolk Howard to-morrow.' Mr. Joshua Bugg was a reader of the *Times*, and he 'followed the leader' implicitly. Not only did he announce in the next day's *Times* his change of name, but actually adopted the

writer's chance suggestion, and took the style of 'Norfolk Howard' from that time. Happy man, one might say, at the price of a short advertisement to end the long annoyance of so loathly a name. But mark again the sort of Nemesis which followed. He hoped, as millions have vainly done, to get rid of the bug; but the very publicity of the proceeding marred the purpose of its author. The multitudinous tribe of bugs whose ranks he left took umbrage at his leaving; the right he exercised they exercised in turn; true to their affectionate nature, they would not part from him whom once they held. When he was Bugg, they all were bugs,—plain, simple, peaceful, pertinacious, and content; but he became Norfolk Howard—so did they. Had poor Joshua taken the name of Cimex, he would have been still a Bugg, though a bug in Latin, and the tribe, familiar already with that epithet, would have been content with being bugs in English. But the temptation to adopt aristocratic style was too much for him, and so he and his descendants must bear for ever to represent that multitudinous nightmare which mocks them still beneath their high-flown name.

This explanation of words by the suggestion of a personal name, however trustworthy where distinct evidence can be adduced, as in the last two instances, is, as I have before said, inadmissible

without proof; to attempt it is an error, caused by want of research. I will now adduce an illustration or two of an error of an opposite character,—that, namely, arising from such over-research as leads enquirers to prefer seeking a remote derivation for a word to looking for it close at home. The word *skewer*, for example, with its vulgar pronunciation *skiver*, may give occasion to very learned disquisition. The linguist's first idea, under the light of the expression *skiver*, will be to refer the word (as the dictionaries do) to the same root as the words *shiver*, a fragment or flake, and *shavings*, of wood. These words are to be found in the Dutch *schyf*, a slice, high German *schiefer* and Danish *skive*, a *slate*; and though it be evident that the butcher's *skewer*, a strong and penetrating stick, is not well suggested by the idea of a weak shaving or a flaky mineral, one is apt enough to sit down content with such an origin as being possible, plausible, and the best to be got. And yet at one's very hand in our own language the true meaning of the word is hidden under another spelling in the word *secure*, which comes from the Latin through a figurative use. What could be more natural than that meat so cut as to be likely to fall to pieces should be *secured* from doing so? Thus the cook or butcher would *secure* the meat, and extend the name of the act to signify the instrument with which the act was done.

A few words may be allowed before we leave the subject on one other common error as to derivations, that, namely, which originates in the determination to find an origin for words or names which were doubtless at first arbitrarily formed, or accidentally applied. As a general rule, every word, perhaps every name, has an origin; but, especially in the matter of names, there are multitudes occurring, in works of fiction for instance, entirely constructed by their authors. These are subject to no rules of interpretation, and should be left alone. We all know how many writers, especially German ones, have seemed to discover in the works of Shakspeare depths of philosophic meaning, transcendent if not transparent, which common sense incontinently scouts; we feel as impatient at such laborious efforts as we should at a person who looking on a beautiful picture hanging on the walls of a gallery, should insist on proving to us his frantic theory that the figure of the original must be behind the canvas, though the picture may be but a fancy sketch. Just as there have been found commentators to expound on the most philosophical and recondite principles, that part of Goethe's 'Faust' which the author himself pronounced to be, not only without hidden meaning, but absolute nonsense (*Dummes Zeug*), so the *cacoethes derivandi* leads people to seek for derivations, even in the

most arbitrary names. A single but striking illustration is that of deducing the name of Swift's imaginary hero, Lemuel Gulliver, from the words *Gull-i-ver*, to gull or deceive in truth. Swift might have called his hero Johnson just as well as Gulliver. In fact, the very existence of Gulliver as an actual *bonâ fide* name to the present day in a part of the country where Swift spent many years, affords a strong presumption against any such intentional meaning on the author's part, while *to gull in truth*, if the phrase mean anything beyond a bull, was neither the object aimed at, nor the effect produced, by the famous book of travels.

CHAPTER IV.

ON ENGLISH WORDS FAULTILY FORMED.

Like very many other things in this world, we must take our language as we get it. A word once really fixed in our speech and literature, if it fulfil the requisite conditions for permanence, that is, if it be necessary and expressive, may well defy the best endeavours purists may direct against its use, if falsely interpreted, or against its very existence, if ill-constructed. It must not, therefore, be supposed that the present chapter, while noting some instances of such words occurring in our language, aims at anything further than to draw the attention of the reader to peculiarities in the use and structure of words in the language, which may prove interesting to some who have used such words throughout their lifetime without reflecting on their proper force and origin.

And by words faultily formed, I do not at present mean words formed by perversion of those

ordinary and established laws which careful observers have discovered and noted as regulating, for the most part on inflexible principles, the passage of words from one language to another, and from other languages to our own; but rather such words as have been adopted from other languages by oral instead of written tradition, and which in such transmission have either lost a part of their native form, or had agglomerated to themselves part of some other words commonly combined with them in their native use. Before giving *bonâ fide* instances of such words, which are to be found in all our dictionaries, and are so fixed in use as to be for ever incapable of alteration and correction, I venture, as showing how such errors originate, to cite a couple, which I have noted in my own neighbourhood, as being more or less on the way to acceptance by the uneducated, and the first of which may in fact be called an accepted dialectic expression in West Surrey.

A few years ago a young man who had been to sea returned home to that part of the country to see his friends. He had been steward on board a West India packet, and his letters led his parents to suppose he had laid by a considerable sum of money. He arrived about ten o'clock at night, in a destitute condition, stating that in our very

quiet neighbourhood, and within a furlong of its busiest part, he had been stopped by two men, who robbed him of his savings and a gold watch. After this adventure he had hurried home more than a mile further, without making anyone acquainted with his loss. The tale met with no more credit than it deserved; he had doubtless, as too many sailors do, fallen into bad hands on his way home, and run through all he had. I noticed that the villagers, in talking over the matter, nearly all used one special expression as to his conduct; it was this: 'Very strange, Sir, that he shouldn't 'a made any sort of *noration*,' meaning any sort of outcry, in a place where he could not fail of being heard.

Now the word oration, being very rare in modern use, the most likely occasion on which they could have heard this word must have been in church, where, hearing that 'On a set day Herod . . . made *an oration*, . . . and the people gave *a shout*, &c.,' they learned to look on the word as suggestive and significative of shouting, and, ignorant of its structure, misdivided the words I have italicised; thus out of *an oration*, making the new form *a noration*, with a new, but comprehensible sense.

The second instance I give is more exceptional, and from the nature of the case one not likely ever

to become general. One of those charming rustic characters whose vanity finds a happy vent in 'airing' the longest possible words, used it to a poor consumptive neighbour, whom his clergyman was urging to take more than he did of open summer air. 'Ay, George boy, 'pend upon't what parson says is right; there's nothing like nailing that mospher.'

Nothing but the context, so to speak, could have explained to the perplexed parson that the new word this circumlocutory linguist was forming meant, 'There's nothing like inhaling the atmosphere.'

These instances may suffice to give a general notion of the way in which such errors as we are about to examine take their rise. Let us now take a few parallels to the word *noration*.

The word *alligator* has had a syllable prefixed in coming into English use. The word is Spanish, *lagarto*, from Latin *lacerta*, which in sound is very like our own word of similar descent, *lizard*. But the word lizard would never have served the purpose of expressing the monster of its tribe, without some qualifying adjective; and, therefore, those who first made the acquaintance of the animal adopted the Spanish name they heard given to it; but their hearers, not recognising the structure of the name, compressed the two words *a lagarto* into

one, which has supplied us with a distinct and independent term for that particular lizard which we now call an *alligator*.

Archbishop Trench, in his book on the 'Study of Words,' supposes *alligator* to be *el lagarto, the* lizard (par excellence), but by quoting Sir Walter Raleigh's use of the word without the Spanish article, he seems to deprive himself of evidence to the strict accuracy of his view.

Louver, a window-like opening in a wall or roof, protected against rain, but not against air, by slanting bars, is another word formed by the agglomeration of the article to its root. *A louver window* (for the word louver has no proper claim to be a substantive at all) is strictly *a window à l'ouvert*, exposed to the open air. The French preposition *à* has been converted into our English article *a*, and *l'ouvert* (the open) into *louver*, now used independently of the article altogether. This will also explain the word *lubber-boards*, the slanting boards placed in a louver window.

Chandler again is a word which, in its extended sense of general dealer, has been ridiculously increased by the prefixal of the letter *c*. The word originally is *handler*, equivalent to the German *händler*, dealer; but *chandler* (from the Latin *candela*, a candle, through the French *chandelier*, a candle maker), being found in the language,

handler was confounded with it. Thus both words were injured, *handler* being misconstructed and almost lost, while *chandler* passed from a definite to a general term, and instead of expressing a single occupation, came to require an explanatory adjunct to fix its meaning. So we say a corn-chandler, or a tallow-chandler. It is true this error may have been fostered by the fact, that the term of *chandlery* proper is applied to two trades formerly distinct in England, and still so in many parts of the continent, namely, tallow and wax-chandlery; and distinct names designate these distinct trades on the continent. Thus a tallow-chandler is in French *chandelier*, in German *Lichtzieher*; while a wax-chandler is in French *cirier*, and in German *Kerzengieszer*, or *Kerzenzieher*. But however this may be, the error of structure in the word has proved of practical inconvenience, as necessitating the use of adjectives to distinguish two words, each of which in its proper sense is self-explanatory.

We should think it strange to hear a man say he had eaten two *noranges*; and yet structurally his language would be justified. We take our term from the Spanish *naranja*, probably because the fruit was first or chiefly imported from Spain. The Spaniards have it from the Arabian *nârang*, Persian *narenz*. Naturally, as we have seen

how *an oration* may change into *a noration*, so *a naranja*, or *a norange* may change to *an orange*. But this error, unlike others I have quoted, is based on scholarship, and can show a fair excuse for its occurrence. The Low Latin word is *orangia*, unquestionably derived in the same erroneous way as ours. Arabic and Persian being languages almost utterly unknown among Europeans, a European origin was naturally sought for the word. Now the Latins called the fruit *malum aureum*, the golden apple; thence to *malum aurantium*, however barbarous the formation, was no great transition; and thence the use of the adjective *aurantium* without the *malum*, or *pomum*, *apple*, was as easily admitted as, in our own language, china or delft is for China or Delft ware. Thus the ancients, with a certain show of reason, derived the word *orange* from *aurans*; and a very good derivation it was till a better was found, which *nârang* or *narenz* certainly is, both structurally and historically.

One of the best suggested derivations of the word *Haberdasher* (a famous crux, by the way, to the anatomists of English) will show us another instance of agglomeration of the article. I think it was in 'Notes and Queries' that I read that a *berdash* was a sort of *neck-tie*; and a quotation given from the 'Guardian,' for March 23, 1712–13,

contains the word as follows:—'I have prepared a treatise against the cravat and berdash,' &c. If this be correct, *haberdasher* is *a berdasher*, the agglomerated *a* being aspirated in cockney fashion.

Another instance of this error of agglomeration in the forming of words is to be found in the word *furlough*. Its etymon in its present form may give many an enquirer trouble to guess at, to whom, if the initial *f* be removed, the form *urlough* would immediately betray its identity with the German word *urlaub* (of the same military meaning as our term), but used in early German writings in its true sense, *permission*. (Of course the analogy of our military expression of the same idea, *on leave*, will strike every reader.) But why have we this initial *f* so unnecessarily prefixed to the word? It is because in the German and cognate dialects, whence we have the word (*f*) *urlough*, the preposition equivalent to our *on* is *auf*, so that the expression *auf urlaub*, used first as a quotation, by hasty utterance became *on f-urlough*.

Without attending to the fact of words in our language being thus frequently altered from a confusion of the article *a* or *an* with the word itself, it would be very hard indeed to suggest a rational derivation for such a word as *apron*. In fact, the dictionaries I have at hand either do not

attempt to explain its origin, or give a wrong one. Webster, for example, derives it thus:—'Irish *aprun*; *a*, or *ag*, and Celtic *bron*, the breast.' We have only, however, to prefix the indefinite article, and redivide the word, to see its real and almost obvious derivation; *an apron*, *a napron*, French *naperon*, a *napkin*. *Nappe* is the French word for a tablecloth, and the diminutive *napperon* means strictly a *table-napkin*. Having already the word *table-napkin* in our language, *napperon* was not wanted to express it, and was consequently applied in England, firstly to what we should call now a *pinafore*, used *at table*, then to anything worn as a pinafore. By a curious analogy, the French general term for an apron retains a special reference to its first use at table, the word by which it is expressed being *tablier*.

This word *apron*, moreover, has not the excuse for its truncated form that other words we have examined may plead, namely, that they entered in such form through error, inseparable from oral transmission; for the correct form, *naperon*, is actually used by Chaucer; and the fact of its so early literary use should have preserved it from coming down to the present time in the inaccurate form it has.

The most reasonable derivation of our word *adder* shows that it should be spelt with a pre-

fixed *n*, *natter*, or *nadder*. It is true that, besides the word *natter* in German, the word *otter* also is used; but this, as far as I can ascertain by a tolerable induction of instances, is always used of what we would call a *viper*; and the uniform presence of the letter *n* in the equivalent for *adder* in all the cognate dialects would seem to warrant the classification of our word amongst those erroneously formed by confusion of the article. Thus we find in Gothic *nadrs*, in old Saxon *nadra*, in old Norse *nadr* and *nadra*, in old High German *natra* and *natara*, and in Anglo-Saxon *nädre*.

Let us take next the word *diamond*. This word, by a striking coincidence, has lost in all the Romance dialects and in English the prefix *a*, essential to its significance, while in the German ones that letter was retained for ages after it had vanished from languages which might have been expected to retain it. But the fact is, the Germans received the word as an importation, and kept it much as they found it: the Romance nations took it, ignorantly, for a native term, and took those liberties with it which men are apt to do with the words they use in ordinary conversation. The word is Greek, *adamas* (gen. *adamantos*), constructed from *a*, a privative prefix signifying *not*, and, *damao*, a verb, meaning *to quell*. The word itself then signifies *invincible*, and is well adapted

to express the surpassing hardness of the diamond. Now the Greeks could never drop this prefix *a*, for it would leave the word signifying *vincible*, instead of *invincible*; but this fact being unknown to ordinary speakers of Romance languages, who took the word late from the Latin, they dropped off the *a*, and we have followed them. The sort of process of change I have been noting was carried still further as regards this particular word in the Romance languages by dropping off the *d*, and using the word thus formed, *aimant*, to signify a magnet; though it may be that this latter form is a compression of the root word *adamant*, without any previous loss of the prefix *a*.

But as this seems to lead us far away from our proposed subject, let me return to the consideration of another word, the origin of which I have nowhere seen explained. I mean the word *dapple*. The letter *d* is in this case redundant, unless we assign it an iterative force; otherwise, that the word should be *apple* is beyond all question. Some writers have referred it to the root of *dab*, others to the French *tabis*, *streaked* (as we speak of a *tabby* cat, &c., or of *tabinet*, a sort of watered poplin), but no one would call a horse marked with similar streaks *dappled* in our sense of the word at all. The word, as ordinarily used, is applied to markings on a horse's coat of a round

shape, reflecting light much as a number of smooth and glossy apples do; and it is precisely from this resemblance that the word is derived. We find in German that the pure and simple word exists, without any unnecessary prefix. *Apfeln* (literally, to apple) is the equivalent for our verb *to dapple*, and an *apfelschimmel* signifies a dapple-grey horse. It is further interesting to observe that the French have the equivalent *pommelé* (from *pomme*, an apple), signifying dappled.

This leads me to a digression upon our word *pommel*, to beat. This word is not derived from the French *pommeau*, a knob (through *pomme*, Latin, *pomum*), in the same way as the *pommel* of a saddle, &c. is; but rather from the verb to *variegate in colour*. Thus the expression 'to pommel one soundly' is equivalent to saying 'to beat one black and blue,'* to cover one with bruises; not as Webster, for instance, lays it down, 'to beat with something thick or bulky,' however calculated such treatment may be to produce that peculiar chromatic effect which the word in its true sense implies.

How readily a person who has never studied the history of words will scout the idea of the word *enamel* being the very same as *smelt*; to such

* Comp. German *bläuen*, to pommel, beat blue.

the jocose derivation even of pickled cucumber, from Jeremiah King,* would seem less unreasonable; yet the fact is indisputable. Instead of *enamel* we should say *amel* (from the French *émail*, Old French *esmail*, Spanish *esmalte*, Middle Latin *smaltum*; all coming from the Old High German *smaltjan*, to smelt, or melt). And, as might be supposed, we actually find the old word *amel* in the dictionaries, though *enamel* has superseded it; another instance of correct literary use being overborne by the prevalence of an error. The French would speak of 'a work *en émail*,' *in amel*, and English ears naturally confounding the French preposition with the word it governed, adopted and retained the false structure *enamel*, which now is as inseparably *smelted* into our language as the vitreous particles of which *amel*, or *enamel*, consists, are blended by the action of the furnace.

* Given in Horne Tooke's 'Diversions of Purley.'

CHAPTER V.

WORDS OF CHANGED OR LIMITED MEANING.

PASSING from these instances of faulty construction, originating as they do for the most part in confusion of sound, and ignorance of the exact form of words of foreign importation, I now come to consider a few specimens, out of a vast number which our language affords, of words which, as ordinarily used, have almost entirely lost their original meaning; and at the head of these I place two which have actually changed places altogether in reference to one another: I allude to the words *lecture* and *sermon*. It is very common to hear a clergyman spoken of as preaching a *sermon* in the morning, and giving a *lecture* in the afternoon; by which the speaker means that the morning discourse is read from manuscript, and the afternoon one delivered extempore, or from notes. The exact meaning of *lecture* implies, however, the act of reading, while that of *sermon*

signifies an harangue. The only origin of such a singular interchange of meanings that occurs to me is this: that the *lecture* reached its present sense from being the designation of some sort of religious meeting, probably held in a private dwelling or unconsecrated building, for the purposes principally of *reading* the Scriptures, and that the simple exposition of the portions read being naturally far more familiar and unconstrained in style than the ordinary sermon preached from a single verse, caused the name given to the whole proceedings of such a meeting to be applied to the expository part of it alone, in contradistinction to the more elaborate form of address which the pulpit sermon generally does, and once almost universally did, present.

Again, such a word as *buxom* has almost entirely lost its true meaning. Strictly speaking, it signifies *pliant*, *flexible*, *obliging*; but more than the great average of those who use or hear the word consider it an amiable and semi-flattering epithet for a fat and genial landlady. As the word *bombastic*, which we shall consider elsewhere, is never applied to a woman, so the word *buxom* is never applied to a man;* its proper use being more or less referable to domestic intercourse, it is plain

* Chaucer has an instance, however, in the 'Schipmanne's Tale;' but there a man is said to be 'buxom *to* his wyff.'

that the lords of the creation would not have it applied to themselves, or admit themselves under any circumstances to be *pliable* by their wives. The average better-half of creation, however, is wise enough not to insist in applying the expression to her husband, beng quite content in very (perhaps too) many cases with the conviction, understood though seldom expressed in equivalent terms, that 'she can wind him round her little finger.'

Such alterations as these I point out, of course arise in the first instance from ignorance of the exact force of the words used; and the right meaning being once arrived at, the wrong usage loses ground; but there are words which some will persist in misapplying, from a mere notion of fashion, in spite of all explanation. Such a word, to take a homely instance, is *apple-tart*, as applied to what should be called *apple-pie*.

As in matters of attire the highest in the land are the slaves of the lowest; since ladies, instead of finding out once for all what style of dress is the best adornment of beauty, are compelled by the necessities of the *modiste* to spend their lives in a continual search after impossible perfection of apparel; so the simplest words are liable to the caprice of that ubiquitous impersonal elf, fashion; who, in the case of senseless perversion of language

to which I now refer, may have set the error going by a misguiding whisper in the ear of some ignorant housekeeper, as she tried to make her '*menu du diner*' as un-English as possible.

And once Mrs. A—— has heard Lady B—— speak of *apple-pie* as *apple-tart*, can the present writer, or even the Philological Society itself (which has published a most interesting cookery book*) hope to save a good old word from losing at her hands one at least of its senses? Let me, notwithstanding, say a word in favour of apple-pie.

The only reason I ever heard for calling an apple-pie an apple-tart (beyond that of its being or seeming fashionable), is the necessity of distinguishing between a meat and a fruit pie. But when does such necessity arise? We talk of veal-pie, or of pigeon-pie, without confusion, though both may be together on the same table, while a meat pie and an apple pie never appear together, and consequently may both be spoken of as pie without distinction or confusion; again, would not this argument require those who hold it to speak also at Christmas time of *mince-tarts*; and would not the veriest infant resent the injury done to the genius of the British language if called upon to declare that A was an apple *tart*, which B bit and

* Liber Cure Cocorum, circa 1440, A.D. Edited for the Philological Society, by R. Morris. 1865.

C cut? Surely the common sense distinction of the two terms lies in this, that a *tart* is baked on a flat dish, while a *pie* is baked in a deep one.

The literal meaning of the word *tart*, brought to us through the French *tourte*, from the post-classical Latin *torta*, is a *twist*, a signification very little suited to the form of a *pie*, though comprehensive enough when assigned to the ornamentation of a tart, according to the definition I have ventured to give of it.

The word *tradition* is now almost universally applied to *oral* as opposed to *written* records, and this, in common with many other arbitrary limitations of the first meaning of words, may be regarded as less an error than an instance of the spontaneous tendency of language to let drop what is needless from its resources, while retaining what is useful. The word *tradition* is wanted in English to express *oral* but not to express *written* records, and hence it is that Webster, in his dictionary, actually limits its sense to *oral communications without written memorials*, a limitation the strict accuracy of which is, however, disproved, strangely enough, by the very instance he quotes in its support: 'Stand fast, and hold the *traditions* which ye have been taught, whether *by word*, or our *epistle*' (2 Thess. ii. 15).

The word *starve*, again, which in its first and

widest sense signifies *to die*, has become limited in practice almost entirely to one sort of death, that by *hunger*; and though the occasional (and perfectly correct) expression *to starve with cold* may be cited in refutation of this statement, we have but to consider the meaning of the substantive formed from the verb, *starvation*, to see how nearly complete the limitation of the general term to one particular sense has become.

When we speak of *resenting* and *resentment* we again use a word of general signification in a restricted sense; the primary meaning of the verb is to *feel, to experience*. A Frenchman would say, 'Il *ressentit* une vive douleur,' for 'He felt acute pain;' but we only use the word to express the sentiment of anger, more or less exhibited. And here a remark may not seem out of place as to the assistance to our comprehension of the Bible (and of many old books besides), which we may derive from remembering this tendency in our language to restrict words of general meaning to a single special sense.

We look on *jealousy* as an odious failing, and the jealous person as possessing an odious and miserable disposition, and, if we be ignorant that the word in its general sense means *zealous*, we find a trial to our faith in reading that 'the Lord our God is a *jealous* God,' and to our comprehension

in reading that Elijah pleaded, as a self-justification, that he had 'been very *jealous* for the Lord of hosts.'

In the same way we might be staggered at finding *indignation* and *revenge* classed as good fruits of godly sorrow in 2 Cor. vii. 11; but the fact is worth noting, that nearly every passion and sentiment in our nature which can be expressed by words, was implanted in that nature for a good and pure purpose, and that it is only the too general perversion of that purpose to one which is baser and meaner, which has made the names descriptive of such passions and sentiments express only what they express oftenest, that which is bad and blameworthy, instead of that which is pure and good. So, though such things as just anger, proper pride, and holy jealousy or zeal exist, we cannot express them without a qualifying adjective before them, since anger, pride, and jealousy, without such qualification, bring only evil things before our minds.

Talking of *resentment* seems naturally to bring us to *revenge*, an old word to express which has entirely changed in meaning. I mean the neuter verb *to reck*, which comes from the Gothic active verb *vrekan*, Anglo-Saxon *vrecan*, to *pursue*, *avenge*. The word with us now means to heed, care, take (angry) notice of, and has passed this sense on

into the adjective *reckless*. The necessities of our language have indeed retained the active sense of the parent verb in the word to *wreak* (vengeance); but it is curious to note, that even in this form the government of the primitive verb is altered by an unaccountable pleonasm, and that, strictly speaking, in saying 'to wreak vengeance on,' we are saying, 'to revenge one's vengeance on,' instead of using the simple expression 'to revenge.'

One important sense of the word *method*, again, a cunning, crafty, roundabout way, is entirely lost; which may teach us how inaccurate it is to talk of *a direct method*, &c. On the other hand a highly strained meaning of a word, whose very structure should give warning against such error, is constantly assigned to *obnoxious*. How often we hear some one spoken of as 'a most obnoxious person,' though the true sense of such a phrase is equivalent to saying he is very servile.* To convey in accurate language the sense in which the word is generally used, the speaker should be careful to state to what or to whom a person is obnoxious.

The common expression, '*to smell a rat*,' in the sense of conceiving suspicion, gives a curious instance of restriction of sense. The German

* 'Si aut superbus, aut obnoxius videar.' Liv. xxiii. 12.

phrase, *Unrath wittern*, to smell something objectionable (comp. *to be in bad odour*), is its origin. The privative German prefix *un* has passed into the English article *a*, and this and a perverted translation have supplied us with a phrase very familiar and very comprehensible, no doubt, but still more essentially figurative than its right form would be; for why we should speak of smelling a rat rather than a cat or a mouse, or a rabbit, in such a connection, I am at a loss to conceive.

The word *van*, as applied to a light cart, has become greatly limited since its first introduction; for it is a great error to assign its origin in this sense, as most dictionaries do, to the same root as the *van* of an army; unless, indeed, the figure Hysteronproteron were even more than now applicable to military matters, and the *cart* were literally put before the *horse*, by sending the baggage in front of the army. The word *van* in this sense is merely the end of the word *caravan*, just as in the same way we use the word *bus* for *omnibus*. A caravan originally meant a train of travellers; it then came to be applied to a train of strollers, showmen, menagerie keepers, &c.; then, as sometimes such parties were few and could be conveyed in one light waggon, such a strollers' covered waggon was called a caravan. I remember well, when a child, that the word in its

unabbreviated form was still applied to covered furniture waggons in the large city in which I was brought up, and that I used firmly to believe such vehicles to have been used by Queen Anne, whose taste was perpetuated by the form of their appellation, supposed by me to be 'Car of Anne.'

Label, again, is a word now very rarely used, except as referring to heraldry or the medicine phial. Its origin is the Latin diminutive *labellum*, a little lip, which seems very far from our present sense of the word; and yet its history is plain enough. We see in the old caricatures (and indeed in their ruder kindred, the wall frescoes executed in chalk by satirical street-boys), a sort of balloon represented as hanging from the mouths of the figures, on which is written what the character represented is supposed to be saying. This method was formerly used in very much higher works of art, and there are few good collections of pictures in which specimens of its occurrence may not be found appearing in the works of the early painters. This appended *lip* it was which received the name of *labellum*, or *label*. But, it may be asked, how does this explain our ordinary application of the term to an oblong piece of paper pasted on the side of a medicine bottle? This pasting on is a comparative novelty in compounding. The label used to be a piece of

paper, broad at one end and narrow at the other, where it was tightly tied round the neck, and close to the *lip* of the phial; and, in point of fact, we see this practice still prevalent among the apothecaries on the continent, and its former general use among ourselves is amply attested by any book illustrations of twenty years old, which happen to represent a sick room. The shape of this literal label far more resembles that of the lip-balloons of which I have spoken above, than any of the rectangular slips pasted on phials in the present day.

The fact that the word *tippler*, from originally meaning a publican, now means any habitual sot, may teach us how universally, even in early ages, the tapster became the slave of his opportunities, and may justify the common saying concerning a drunken Boniface, 'He is his own best customer.' And the further fact of the word *sot*, which I have just used, having become restricted from its general sense, *foolish* (Fr. *sot*), to signify *a drunkard* may also show how the long course of years which moulds the members of a language to their modern meanings, can bear striking witness to the truth, that drunkenness is indeed the ruling folly, as it is the crying sin, of the age and nation in which our earthly lot is cast.

The word *punctual* is general in its first sense,

though we restrict its meaning to time; while strangely enough the term *tidy*, which strictly means only punctual to time, has become a perfect and comprehensible expression for an absolute essentiality of accuracy and neatness; and, in fact, expresses the widest extension of the word *punctual* as applied alike to time and place and duty.

The word *cant*, which now-a-days signifies principally any expression of shallow and unreasonable bigotry or hypocrisy, entered our language first, if I mistake not, as meaning the whining cry of professional beggars; though its root being unquestionably the Latin *cantare*, to sing, it seems probable enough that it gained its beggar sense from some instinctive notion of its quasi-religious one. If we look at the whole class of words comprising *enchant*, *incantation*, &c., we find them all primarily referable to religious ceremonies of one sort or another; and doubtless, in days when men believed in the efficacy of prayers repeated on their behalf as an *opus operatum*, apart from any sincerity on the part of their utterer, we can comprehend how important a part of a beggar's daily labour was the invoking, or seeming to invoke, blessings on those who gave them alms. This, and the natural tendency to utter any oft-repeated phrases in a sing-song rhythmical tone, most probably gave the word *cant* its present

meaning; and it is noteworthy that a precisely equivalent word is current now to express the same idea. I allude to the word *patter*, signifying the language of tramps and mendicants. Though this word has of course a different and evident root when it signifies the sound of hail or children's footsteps (comp. Fr. *patte*, Low German *pott*, a paw, &c.), I cannot but think that, as applied to beggars' language, it takes its origin from the *Pater nosters* which beggars used to promise and pretend to say on behalf of those who aided them. Very appositely, though unintentionally, Longfellow uses the term in this connection in his 'Midnight Mass for the Dying Year':—

> 'And the hooded clouds, like friars,
> Tell their beads in drops of rain,
> And *patter their doleful prayers*,
> But their prayers are all in vain,
> All in vain!'

If we take the common meaning of a *challenge* in the present day, we find it to be a provocation to combat, or at all events a defiance of some sort; the legal sense, however, that of lodging an objection, is much nearer to the original one, which strictly signifies a *calumny*. As, however, our present idea of the word *calumny* is limited to a *false accusation* or *slander*, it becomes a reasonable question to ask, why we should have two words, radically identical,

and yet so different in meaning, as *challenge* and *calumny*. The history of the fact is simple; we derive the word *calumny* direct from Lat. *calumnia*, in the sense of *slander*; but the old French takes *chalenge*, and hands it down to us in another and more exact sense of the Latin word, namely, that of a *denial*, a *legal chicane* or *objection*.* Thus to give or enter a *challenge* was first to interpose against the course of judgment; and would correspond with the legal term *demur* (lit. delay), *demurrer* as we now use it; then it was employed (as it still is) to signify the act of a prisoner in objecting to any particular individual forming a part of a jury to try him, and was naturally used in this sense, from the fact, that to make such an objection valid, it was held necessary to show some sort of reason why the proposed juror should not be considered an impartial trier. And here our modern sense of *calumny* crops out again, so to speak, in the implication that a man on his oath was likely to be biassed from making a true deliverance. In fact, the word thus used implies no longer a quibble or chicane, but an expression of *distrust*. And thus we come again to a striking parallelism between the legal and conventional meaning of the word *challenge*, for *distrust* is the exact and literal meaning of

* 'Calumniâ dicendi tempus eximere'—to speak against time. Cicero. Epist. ad. Q. Fratrem, II. 2, 3.

the word *defiance*; and it is also worth remarking, that our language, in adopting two terms meaning *distrust* to express as they do the calling out of an adversary to combat, leave us no others but these for such use; since the proper word for such an act, *provocation* (*calling out*), finding its place so supplied, has set up business on its own account in another line, and refuses to concern itself with the expression of anything besides trial to temper.

Multitudes of words might be instanced more or less striking, as altered or restricted in sense from their original meanings; but I shall refer to but one more, the true force of which is strangely neglected. I mean the word *trial*, as applied to *affliction*.

How few there are who talk of their own or their neighbours' trials, who at all think of what is tried, or what the result of the trials is; how many an utterly godless, irreligious man will speak of his losses, or his sicknesses, or his bereavements, as *trials*, without reflecting that he is talking utter nonsense. True, those he speaks to are like-minded with himself, and understand him; he takes in his lips the religious phrase of *trial* to express his mere worldly sense of suffering, just as he takes the religious name of Christian to express the worldly sense of Englishman, or European, or white man, as the case may be, but with no more thought of

its right meaning than seems to be given to that of grace before meat when the guests are hunting for good places at a dinner party, or to the common phrases (which are so seldom prayers) of 'Good-bye,' or 'God bless my soul!' But the use of the word trial implies something to try; and what do afflictions try, unless it be the faith of one who trusts a Heavenly Father? If, then, a man be without a faith to try, his sufferings are no true trials, and his calling them so only shows that he is adding maundering to his mourning, and confounding the helpless 'Kismet' of the fatalist with the believer's confident 'Thy will be done!'

CHAPTER VI.

ON RARELY NOTED PRIMITIVE MEANINGS OF ENGLISH WORDS.

I PURPOSE in the present chapter to discuss the etymology of some English words which, originally figurative, have lost that distinctive character from their general and primary meaning becoming limited in ordinary use to some one or more particular senses to the exclusion of the rest.

The instances by which this peculiarity may be illustrated are very numerous, and any of my readers whom the subject happens to interest may, by a little consideration of the words they use from day to day, or meet with in the conversation and writings of others, discover multitudes of cases similar to those which I am about to notice; which in fact are only cited here as illustrations of a general principle, the remarking of which may direct the merest amateurs of language to a line of independent examination calculated to afford them very considerable pleasure.

Let us take, in the first place, the word *person*, as one affording an instance not only of some interest in its general use, but also, from the erroneous reference to it as the origin of another word, *parson*, showing what mistakes may be adopted and perpetuated by a neglect of the figurative element which the primary use of the word contains.

The present meaning of the word *person*, is in its widest and most accepted sense, synonymous with *human individual*. It can be applied with equal accuracy to man, woman, or child, of any rank, class, or quality; in its plain form it is more general than *man*, since it can be applied to members of a different sex and a different age of the human race than the word *man* can be; and it is more particular than *individual*, since that term may be accurately applied not only to members of the human race, but to those of any class of animals and any class of things. Again, the word can be used to signify contempt (as the Quakers use the depreciative *that*, saying by little where they wish to express much, '*That* Isaac,' or '*that* Joseph'); and it may be used to express disgust, as in the words 'So-and-so is a most objectionable person.' Again, it may express distinction between classes, as when we are unwilling to speak of a milliner or a barmaid as a young *lady* (though, indeed,

American notions would scout such hesitation), and we regard the class as sufficiently expressed by speaking of 'the young person.' In this use, by the way, the word implies a female, since the same shade of difference does not need expression in talking of our own clumsier and coarser sex, which may be designated by so many familiar correlatives, which begin in *man*, and pass through *lad* and *fellow* down to the more vulgar but equally expressive '*chap*.' So, again, the word *person* may be used as a matter of dignity, as we say 'A person of quality, a person of importance,' where we do not say 'a man (or a woman) of quality.'

And yet not one of these many senses gives the slightest hint of the original meaning of the word. It is formed of the two Latin words, *per*, *through*; and *sono*, *I sound*; and consequently signifies primarily that through which sound comes. But how on earth, the general reader will say, can this come to mean our word *person*? And the answer is, after all, a very simple one. In the early drama no such thing was known as a female actor; all the parts were taken by men and boys; and what in theatrical language is called the *get-up* of a performer consisted for the most part in a head-dress representing the character he undertook. This head-dress covered the face, forming a mask with a vast mouth, and to this the word *persona* was

applied, from the fact of the actor's voice *sounding through* the mask. Thus we may note in passing that the term *person* specially refers to the great mouth of the mask, as the word *mask* itself does, if we accept Grimm's derivation of that word, *masticare, to chew*. *Mask* we still retain in the sense of an irregular drama,—for instance, the 'Comus' of Milton; while the word *persona* still testifies to its original meaning in the expression *dramatis personæ*, signifying the cast of characters in a play.

It will readily occur to the mind that our words *personate* and *personify* refer far more directly to the origin of the word than *person* itself, the sense of which has wandered so far and spread so widely from its root; while the fact of a character in a play becoming a synonym for any member of the human race affords a sort of antecedent illustration of the common adage so well expressed by Shakspeare,—

> 'All the world 's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players.'

A striking example of the earlier and more exact sense of the word is afforded by the following extract from a letter of the famous Charles Townshend, written in 1763, wherein, speaking of the minister Grenville, he says, 'This man has

crept into a situation he cannot fill; *he has assumed a personage he cannot carry*; he has jumped into a wheel he cannot turn.'

Had it not been that the original sense of the word 'person' had been entirely lost in the wide meaning now assigned to it, the ridiculous error of deriving the word *parson* from it never could have occurred. A sort of ground for this idea certainly was afforded by Blackstone in his 'Commentaries,' in which he referred the word *parson* to *person*, implying that the parson of a parish was in theory what he certainly is not necessarily in fact, *the person*, the individual of most importance in a parish. But Blackstone, though a good lawyer, was but an indifferent philologer, or he would have observed the necessary connection between *parson* and *parish*, specially illustrated by the existence of the word *parishioner*. The word *parson* is, in fact, equivalent to *parishion*, a compression of *parochianus*, which as a substantive means *one belonging to a parish*. We English have taken *parochianus* in one sense, *parson*, for the minister *belonging to a parish*; the French have taken it in another, *paroissien*, the inhabitant *belonging to a parish*; and when our language needed to describe members of the parson's flock, the form equivalent to *paroissien* being already usurped in *parson*, it was obliged to form the word *parishioner*, as im-

plying the relation of the ordinary resident to the appointed minister in a parish. This point might seem hardly necessary to discuss were it not that personal experience has shown me the false importance which may be attached to, and the false conclusions deduced from, a misapprehended etymology. Thus, at the present time especially, when systematic efforts are being made to foster pernicious and unwarranted priestly notions, and when every flimsy rag of language as well as of millinery is invested with undue significance, in order to support assumptions which the common sense and the Christian instinct of Protestant England long since pronounced and will soon again, please God, pronounce to be intolerable,—at such a time it is of interest to those who would make the *parson* or clergyman a sacrificing priest instead of a commemorating minister, to assert, and insist upon the assertion, that the *parson's* name implies what they would have his nature to be; that he is, in his priestly capacity, the one chief, prominent, and principal member of the parish, *the person*, *par excellence*, within the limits of his cure. But happily, in this case the science of language refutes this argument and the conclusion attempted to be drawn from it, just as in the same way the simplest study of the word *priest*, the meaning whereof some either studiously or

stupidly pervert, will show it to contain in itself the idea of an *elder* only, quite apart from any shade of reference to sacrificial character.

Very few people in using the common phrase, *to tell a story*, consider how ill the expression corresponds with the first use of the word *tell*. This means to *count*; so *to tell a story* in the strict sense *to count a story* is absurd. The accurate metaphor is, *to tell a tale*, from the act of counting a number; in which sense the Book of Exodus mentions that the Israelites were compelled to deliver their *tale of bricks*. This meaning of the verb *tell* is, except in dialectic use, obsolescent, though we find reference to it time after time in such phrases as 'I would trust him with untold gold,' or in the theatrical formula, 'Here is the sum twice-told.' The languages of our immediate neighbours (to go no farther for illustration) have adopted exactly the same metaphor; so we have in French the word *compte*, a reckoning; *conte*, a story; *compter*, to count; *raconter*, to *relate*, *recount*. In German, *zahl*, a *number*; *zählen*, to count; *erzählen*, to *relate*, *recount*; *erzählung*, a *story*, *tale*.

But in connection with this word I am able to point out a very curious instance of the reversal of what may be called the natural process of derivation, in the formation of an apparently regular verb from an actually irregular participle. We

speak of church bells ringing, sounding, pealing, &c.; so they sound to assemble the congregation to devotion; they ring out a merry peal for a wedding or a birth; they are 'rung backwards,' as the expression is, when in the dead of night some quick alarm is needed; but there is only one occasion, and that a solemn one, in which we properly can say the bells are *tolled*; and that is 'when man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.' It is true that an occasional misapplication of the term to some ordinary ringing of bells may be cited, but the exception almost proves the rule that the *tolling* of bells is specially funereal. If we turn to the dictionaries we find no sort of explanation given or reason assigned for this peculiar use; thus Bailey gives simply '*Toll*, the sound of a bell, giving notice of a death or funeral;' and 'to toll a bell is to ring it after a particular manner, to give notice of the death or funeral of some person.' Johnson, again, on '*toll*,' to sound as 'a single bell,' frankly admits his ignorance of the etymology of the word. Webster, with his usual wisdom, explains the verb as a synonym of *ring*, giving, however, no illustration, but referring it to a Welsh root, '*tawl*, a throw or cast, a driving; and this,' he says, 'is the radical sense of *sound*;' and he sagely adds, 'Tolling is a different thing from ringing,' without, however,

attempting to explain wherein the difference consists. The true origin of the term, however, lies hid beneath the unsuspected grammatical perversion to which I have already referred.

To toll a bell is an inaccurate way of saying *to tell a knell on a bell.* When an inhabitant of a parish died it was customary to sound the church bell (passing bell) for two reasons: firstly, because it was supposed that the agitation of the air caused by the sound from consecrated bells availed to prevent evil spirits molesting the parting soul in its flight towards heaven; and secondly, to invite neighbours and friends to join in supplication for that one about to depart from among them. At the end of the knell proper it was usual (and is still in many places) to indicate, by some peculiarity in the ringing, the sex and age of the deceased, and this was done by a certain number of strokes sounded apart, generally three for a child, six for a woman, and nine for a man. These strokes, of course, were counted, and had an arithmetical idea connected with them; and thus the knell at its conclusion was said to be *told* or counted. By degrees this idea became confused or lost, and the participle *told* was referred to a supposed infinitive *to toll*, instead of its natural infinitive *to tell* or count; thus making an irregular infinitive to match an irregular participle by a

converse process to that so deservedly ridiculed by our great scholar, the late John Mitchell Kemble.*

By carrying the history of this error a little further we may arrive at the elucidation of an otherwise most obscure proverb. The strokes *told* or counted at the end of a knell were called, from their office, *tellers*; this term, again, was corrupted into *tailors*, from their sounding at the end or *tail* of the knell, and nine of these being given to announce the death of an adult male gave rise to the common saying, 'Nine tailors make a man,'—a formula otherwise expressed by the very vulgar fraction, tailor $= \frac{\text{man}}{9}$, 'a tailor is the ninth part of a man.' It was this proverb which afforded such an opportunity to the wit (commonly said to have been John Philpot Curran) who, having been given an entertainment by the guild

* 'A remarkably absurd practice prevailed during the last century. The truly original and ground-forms of the language having been called *irregular*, a logical fallacy suggested to the purists that what was irregular must be wrong, and language was inundated with new weak preterites and participles, which have, thank Heaven, not maintained themselves; but we had then such pleasant formations as *springed* for *sprang*, *hanged* for *hung*; the wind *blew*, and the cock *crew* no longer,—they now *blowed* and *crowed*. In short, these masters and doctors, though grammarians and lexicographers, *knowed* a thing or two less than they ought,' &c.—*Extract from an unpublished review of 'Grimm's German Grammar,' by the late J. M. Kemble.*

of Tailors, said at his departure, 'Gentlemen, I am indebted to you for some most delightful hours, the enjoyment and honour of which shall never fade from my recollection. Gentlemen' (there were just eighteen present), 'I wish you *both* a very good evening.'

The game of billiards exhibits another illustration of a similar grammatical perversion to that shown in *to toll* instead of *to tell* a knell. A player is continually said to have *held* a ball when he drives it into a pocket. So universal is this that to say 'he holed the red ball' would startle listeners as much as the super-accurate follower of the Greek text did his hearers by reading out how 'Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria.' Yet there is meaning in the expression 'to *hole* a ball,' where there is none in saying 'to *hold* a ball,' which the player does not even touch with a finger. In this case the irregular participle of the verb to *hold* is assigned by error to the verb to *hole*, and this with such complete success as to have actually enabled the wrong verb, *to hold*, to oust the right one *to hole* altogether from its place.

And these few words about billiards lead me back to our special subject through the word *cue*, which we use in two very different figurative senses, both springing from the same root, French

queue, Lat. *cauda*, *a tail*, though their meaning is almost universally unconsidered. One of these senses is the dramatic one; a player waits for his *cue*, that is, for the catchword of the last speaker, before beginning his part. This might indeed be assigned directly to the word *queue*, *tail*, as meaning the last word of the preceding speaker; but it certainly would be a great strain upon the true force of the French word; and the error of such interpretation is shown by the constant use of the expression, 'he took his cue from some one else.' It is, in fact, a billiard metaphor, and refers to the practice (alas! so often necessary in country houses, where glue-loosening damp pervades the rarely used billiard-room, and encourages the leather tops to fly perpetually off the cues which are useless without them) of one player, having finished his turn, 'giving the cue' to another, who 'takes his cue' from him.

The other sense is very different, though very familiar; that, namely, in which we say, 'I am not in the cue for a thing,' meaning not in the humour, not disposed for it. Johnson and Webster (who almost literally follows him), having no sort of idea of the origin of the expression, set it down as a mere vulgarism, dismissing any further reference to it in the same complacent way that the first fox most of us ever read of blasted the

grapes he could not reach by his declaration of their being sour. But, whatever the ill-comprehended expression may have been in Johnson's days, it is unquestionably no longer a mere vulgarism in ours. In fact, its history shows it to be a translation from the French, and probably to have been introduced by travellers, who centuries ago were more generally gentlemen than snobs; and further, we shall see that the thing this so-called vulgarism signifies affords an actual illustration of politeness.

Suppose an Englishman on the Continent for the first time, and desirous of obtaining admission to some public place to which crowds of people, like-minded with himself, are thronging; whether it be the ticket office of a railway station before the excursion train starts, or the pit of a theatre on the first night of some long advertised new play, he will miss, and to his great surprise, the long-familiar features of the noble British squeeze. He comes in sight of 'his' railway station, or 'his' theatre, as the case may be, and where he has expected to see a heavy, sweltering mass of living beings, an agonizing agglomerate of melting mortality, the coast seems clear for him almost up to the very door. There are no mischievous shrieks from lads who try to create the idea of some unhappy woman fainting in the crush; nor are there the

ordinary facilities for deliberate pocket-picking or the ordinary difficulties in preventing its practice.

Our Englishman is astounded; he wonders at the want of enthusiasm and eagerness in that Parisian public he has always believed to be so emotional and volatile. His first idea is to think how bad a speculation the excursion or the opera will be for its undertakers; his next is to turn back, lest he should be suspected capable of committing himself so far as to patronise an unsuccessful entertainment; his third is to see his purpose through now that he is there; and so he makes his unimpeded way up to within two feet of the paying-place. There he has the privilege of beholding the ticket-giving process carried on with a sublime and deliberate calmness which augurs well for the early reception of his own long ready coin. One after another negotiates his ticket and passes on and in to the goal of his desires; if patient enough the Englishman may even see one hundred after another pay and pass, and still he holds his place and his purchase-money, and is no further than before. He rubs up his Latin, perhaps, to illustrate his feelings, but the very quotation he lights upon shows he is wasting his time:—

> 'Rusticus expectat dum defluat amnis, at ille
> Labitur et labetur in omne volubilis ævum.'

And yet there is no crowd, no thronging, no noise. But what is there instead? Why, from the pay-place back, perhaps a furlong's length, there is a long, unbroken file of human beings, undulating like a slumbering eel, who are patiently waiting their turn to pass quietly in. Woe to the rude wight who would try to force himself before a single man or woman of the train! the Briton, wiser than he came, goes back along that lengthened line even to the very last, and, if he would get in at all, buttons himself on, as it were, metaphorically, to that last man, and waits his turn. There is not one there less eager for entrance than himself; but all know that the best way to secure such entrance is this quiet method which social good sense has sanctioned, and trusts to public opinion, a judge inexorable as Pluto, to enforce the fair decree, 'first come first served.'

This single file of human beings is called in French the *queue* or tail. Of course, no one who has no desire to get a ticket chooses to stand behind another's back from five to fifty minutes for nothing; so that it is a fair presumption that every member of the line wishes to procure a ticket for whatever is going on, and is disposed, or, as we may say, *in the humour*, to attend the performance. Those who are not so pass on their way; and hence to be disposed and anxious for a thing

is expressed by the saying '*to be in the queue for it*,' and to be not disposed for it is 'not to be in the queue for it.'

So excellent is this institution, and so well does it work abroad, that I am sure few will be disposed, now they understand the term with which it has furnished us, to agree with Johnson and Webster in calling it a vulgar, low expression; while undoubtedly many who can recall their sufferings in a rude, surging mob of British sight-seers would be glad in this respect of a little foreign vulgarity asserting its presence. Even as I write I seem to feel still the pangs of pain and indignation I suffered many years ago in a Jenny Lind squeeze, such as Dicky Doyle the unsurpassable has depicted in 'Manners and Customs of ye Englishe.' I had stood at the entrance of the concert-room nearly an hour before the doors were open and the ugly rush took place; in the many surgings of the mighty crowd I had actually laboured to assist and protect two (I was going to say ladies, but ladies are grateful; I can't say young persons, for they weren't young; nor can I say women, for that is considered a slight; or females, for such persons are no longer supposed to exist),—well, two individuals of a different sex from my own. Though admitting, as the rest of the crowd insisted, that persons of that sex should have stayed

out of such a crush, I had to deal with the fact of their presence, and had done my best to keep the pressure off them; I had remonstrated with a big man, ridiculed a middle-sized man, and bravely smashed the hat of a little man among those who 'scrowdged' them; and will it be believed that when the doors at length were opened, and the suffocating crush of human beings began to gurgle through the narrow passage like the wine out of a bottle turned upside down, one of those miserable wretches I had so chivalrously defended, in her base selfish eagerness to advance, planted and worked, as a carpenter might a bradawl, her preternaturally sharp elbow deep into my backbone? I seemed to hear the cartilages creaking, while her penetrating ulna dug between my vertebræ as the sock of a plough struggles against great stones in the furrow; I had no time to turn, no room to fly, no breath to remonstrate; I could only rage and suffer, as I did in fact, and as I have often done since in recollection of my usage; and, alas! on comparison of notes, I fear my painful experience is but too often and too accurately paralleled by that of my compatriots.

But perhaps my readers are not *in the cue* for so long a digression *à-propos* of explaining the term; let me merely say, in taking leave of it, that we have a parallel expression to the French one, though

not so distinctly demonstrable. The British foot-crowd still throngs, presses, tramples, but the French fashion is followed as it has been for centuries by carriages. Go down Langham Place about half-past ten on the night of some popular concert at St. James's Hall, and you will see the *queue* of carriages already beginning there, and fringing the footway in its single file through all the length of Regent Street. Now this is called '*the line*,' and we often use as an expression of disinclination for any course or proceeding the phrase, 'it is not in my line at all.'

As the game of billiards has supplied two phrases for our examination, so we may also draw a couple from the game of backgammon. How many people talk of 'turning the tables,' without an idea that they are using a figure of speech drawn from that game! We talk of a cribbage-board, a Pope Joan board, a chess-board, a back-gammon-board; but it is only in reference to the last that we use the word *tables* at all, and then as referring to that part of the board specially belonging to each competitor. And this is, in fact, the last remnant of the ancient name of the game. The word *backgammon* means 'the game (*gamon*)* of the trough (*bac*),' which is a correct

* Compare the exclamation 'Gammon' with the phrase, 'To make game.'

descriptive term for the pastime; but in early times it was universally known as the *game of tables*. Now even supposing a chess-board to have been called a *table*, it never could have been called by the plural name *tables*, and our adage is universally *to turn the tables*; and practically to turn the tables, or backgammon-board, is entirely to reverse the relative positions of two antagonists.

The accuracy of this derivation is obvious, once we become aware of the fact that *backgammon* went by the name of the game of tables; but the derivation of our expression 'to hit a *blot*,' a metaphor taken from the same game, may not be so generally admitted.

Johnson refers the word *blot* to the French *blottir*; which, however, only exists as a reflective verb, *se blottir*, to *squat, crouch, cower*. How on earth this gives any idea such as we can connect with a blot on a copy, a blot on one's escutcheon, &c., I am unable to apprehend. Webster, again, gives as its etymon the Gothic *blauthjan*, *to stain*; while Richardson, following Horne Tooke in his 'Diversions of Purley,' makes it equivalent to *be-hlot*, which he says is the regular past participle of the verb *be-hlidan* (lit., *be-lid*), to cover; adding that 'a blot upon anything extends just as far as that thing is covered and no farther.'

But how is this to explain the meaning of a

blot at backgammon, when we know that the fact of being covered or not makes all the difference between a *point* or a *blot* in that game, and that a blot is precisely that which is not covered at all?

Johnson does not attempt an explanation; and, indeed, where he would draw the common meaning of the word from the French *blottir*, to crouch, no lucid interpretation of the backgammon sense can be expected. He merely gives the backgammon use without comment, and Webster simply quotes his words. Richardson, in turn, ignores that use altogether, not referring to backgammon at all, or noting our common phrase of 'hitting a blot,' for finding out a weak place in anything; neither does Horne Tooke make any reference to the term.

Now the confusion of the two first-mentioned, and the silence of the two last, are caused by overlooking a simple fact which it is very important should be kept in view by all etymological enquirers; and that is, that in very many cases words exactly the same in form are different in sense, having entered our language, as it were, from different directions. This fact appears in the two senses of the word blot: rational explanations of the ordinary sense and its origin are given; but the meaning of the word as a term of backgammon implying exposure cannot possibly be referred

to a root implying *to cover*. In the backgammon sense *blot* is cognate with the German *blosz*, *naked*, *bare*; and on turning to the dictionary we find that a *blot* at backgammon is expressed in German by the word *blösze*, lit., *nakedness*, *exposure*; while our very phrase, '*to hit a blot*,' is literally identical with the German one, '*eine Blösze treffen*.'

The word *period*, again, except in scientific use, is one which has lost all immediate connection with its radical and original sense. As referred to time we may say (and do say very often), English literature may be classed under three *periods*: from Chaucer to the Reformation (say 1350 to 1520, 170 years), from the Reformation to Milton (say 1520 to 1660, 130 years), and from Milton's time to ours (say 200 years); and the use of this expression, which the necessities of our language have rendered universal, is still inaccurate: while if we speak of a number of periods of time of equal length, such as centuries, years, months, weeks, we shall be using the word with perfect accuracy. For we take it metaphorically from its astronomical use, which expresses the recurring and equal measures of the time taken by a heavenly body to complete its orbits; and our substantive and adjective, *periodical*, still retains the accurate astronomical idea which the word suggests. But our use of the word period in the sense of punctuation

is still more involved. When a planet has completed an observed circuit it does not cease to revolve, but nevertheless the idea of completion has so far and so generally suggested the idea of cessation, that we actually have taken the word implying the planet's entire circuit to express our notion of its conclusion only, and close a sentence with a full stop under the name of a period. The establishment of this sense, again, has given us another metaphor, and from the use of a period or full stop in writing we have learnt, in the sense of terminating or checking any course of proceeding, to speak of putting a *period* or a *stop* to it. We may further note in this case (as may be noted also in numberless others) how by some unconscious instinct of accuracy, when the original sense of a word has become lost in its metaphorical one, the words used in connection with it are still suited to the primitive though forgotten idea; for the word *period* implies a circuit, a course *round* a centre, and to express smoothness and accuracy of a writer's sentences we constantly speak of his *periods* being well *rounded*.

Some use the word *salient* in two senses, either as *assailable* or *projecting*; thus we speak, and quite correctly, of *a salient angle*, that is of an angle projecting from a mathematical figure, or from a fortification. The meaning of the word itself is

literally *leaping*, from Latin *salire*, to spring; and the analogy of the German language shows us a literal translation of the Latin term in the expression of *herausspringender Winkel* (outleaping angle) for a projecting or salient angle. But the use of the word in the sense of *assailable*—as, for instance, when we say '*a salient point* in his argument was so-and-so'—has no such justification, if we mean to say that such a point was weak and vulnerable. An angle may jut out, a mere point cannot; and the fact is, that in such an expression we are using, without knowing it, a medical metaphor to express a *vital* and so a vulnerable point. The expression 'punctum saliens,' in its proper use, signifies 'a throbbing, pulsating spot,' such as the heart in an embryo, in strict accordance with which sense we are familiar with the phrase '*a bounding pulse*.' Thus the original meaning of the term, which now seems quite neglected, is that of a *vital point* in the sense of importance, not of vulnerability; so that, to be accurate, the salient point of an argument, so far from signifying its weakness, should imply its essential strength,—the very thing which proves its life, instead of that which exposes it to destruction.

Multitudes, again, speak of a person aiming 'point-blank' at an object, without entertaining or conveying the slightest idea of a laborious and

minute calculation. Yet the origin of the word *aim* (Lat. *æs-t-imo*, estimate) implies the computation of a money value, and from first signifying a counting of cost has come to mean the preliminary steps of an actual calculation. *Point-blank*, again, is an artillerist's metaphor (I use the word artillerist in its general sense, as referring to the whole science of projectiles), and owes its origin as a distinctive term to the almost instinctive appreciation of the nature of a parabola. These days of rifle-shooting have made every one familiar with the fact that the farther a projectile is to be carried, the higher angle with the plane of the horizon must be made by the weapon from which it is projected. This angle is, of course, scientifically speaking, a matter of exact calculation, and a certain degree of elevation must be given to a weapon intended to carry any considerable distance; but where the distance is very short this degree of elevation becomes absolutely incalculable; and while the elevation for long shots is spoken of as reaching some certain point of the quadrant, whether an angle of one, five, or ten, a shot directly straight can have no index of elevation, and its deviation from the plane of the horizon being practically nothing, the word *point-blank* accurately and formally expresses its direction.

The two senses in which we use the word *engross* spring from two different uses of the same French term. The root is that of Latin *crassus*, thick, and Teutonic *grosz*, great (the interchangeability of which is remarkable in the German phrase *Crassdummheit*, *gross stupidity*). The scrivening sense of the word engross is now almost entirely limited to writing on parchment, as distinguished from writing on paper; the distinction being, however, an altogether arbitrary one, probably arising from the greater amount of flourishing and penmanship expended on a parchment calculated to last for ages than on the more perishable substance of paper.

The initial and leading words were written in old deeds in very large and highly ornamented characters, which required in many places to be rather painted than written with ink, in order to make the strokes sufficiently thick. Naturally such writing would be called *thick* (French *gros*) for distinction's sake, and the act of doing so received the name of *engrossing*. Another explanation of how it came specially to mean parchment-writing may be found in the fact, that while the body of a deed may be written by any clerk, the large initials, the letters strictly *en gros*, *in the thick style*, are generally executed by a person who makes such work his special occupation.

But our expression to engross, in the sense of monopolizing and usurping, comes from another meaning of the French phrase; for *en gros* signifies *wholesale* as opposed to *retail*, and thus has given a metaphorical signification for the act of buying up or collecting anything firstly in extensive, and then in unreasonable proportion.

The verb to *repair*, in the sense of movement, has almost totally lost its distinctive force; and the confusion of its use may give us a warning against supplanting good, sensible, unequivocal English words by ill-comprehended importations. By saying, for instance, 'Luther repaired to Rome,' instead of 'Luther went (or journeyed) to Rome,' we commit a blunder, sanctioned perhaps by prescription, but none the less on that account a blunder; for to *repair* means *to return home*; Lat. *repatriare*, lit., *to go back to one's fatherland*; and the French term of chase which gives *repaire* as meaning the den of a wild animal, implying thus a settled abode, conveys the exact idea of the original. Thus, by a slight stretch of the figure, a regiment may be said to repair to its barracks, a king to his palace, a courtier to court (supposing him able to feel really at home there); but no one who values the fitness of words would feel justified in saying that 'a regiment, a king, or a courtier *repaired* to a review.'

CHAPTER VII.

ON SLIPSHOD ENGLISH CAUSED BY FAULTY STYLE.

THE days are rapidly passing away in which no one travelled half a dozen miles in a railway carriage without some fellow-passenger informing him that 'steam was a wonderful thing;' so also are those days departing in which, if any of us underwent threepenn'orth of an omnibus journey, we were sure to meet some otherwise worthy lady, standing, or rather sitting, on her dignity, disparaging the vehicle whilst enjoying its convenience, and giving the general public to understand that she was quite unaccustomed to this sort of thing, and, in fact, was only making a mere trial trip, positively for the first and last time. Custom and habit have much to answer for in sending as they have so large a class of our fellow-mortals off the earth, and leaving human nature shorn of one of its many distinguishing traits. But this is but a trifling accusation to bring against our time of rapid locomotion and

lightning-swift intercommunication of ideas. Railways, telegraphs, and penny postage, if they have not changed human nature in its essence, have changed it in its exercise, and peopled the universe with *fast men* in at least one sense of the term. As different ages have had different names, of gold, of bronze, of iron, may we not call our own the age of mercury? And, in the leisure-devouring, time-filling race of life we are all running at our highest pressure, may we not, as it were, put our head for a moment now and then out of the window of our express train, even at the risk of losing breath in the proceeding, and take a rapid glance at the scenery we leave so quickly before it have quite faded from our sight? In such a view we catch here and there a glimpse of some charming landscape we might like to see again,—a sight grateful to the eye in passing, and pleasant to the memory when past, if life would give us leisure for remembrance; and we may here and there have the swift conviction flashed upon our minds, that though we live so much faster in our modern times, and cram such multitudinous experiences into our short span as would have been impossible fifty years ago, all is not sheer gain and profit, and that some good things must be given up to leave our hands at liberty for laying hold on others which we may consider better worthy of our grasp.

The railway has its infinite advantages—speed, comfort, security (for a fair-sized man who avoids falling asleep opposite a possible Müller), and an average punctuality to which the best of coaching could make no pretensions; it has its winter shelter, its spring cushions, and its foot-warmers; and it saves time,—how much! and often of how great importance! But can its charms be compared by a man of leisure, on a sweet June day, to sitting on a coach behind (say) old spectacled Falkner and a tidy team, on that noble Portsmouth road which runs through so beautiful a country between Godalming and Petersfield? Can the lover of the picturesque be as happy dashing from side to side of his padded cage, to catch a glimpse through the engine's smoke or circling steam at 'pretty bits' which pass him like the changes in a kaleidoscope, as in printing on his retina the ineffaceable pictures of beauty, which he can mark and measure in excited ease as the coach performs its furlong to the mail train's mile? And if the coach be pleasanter for sight, what must it be for sound? In the train, the roar of the engine, the scream of the whistle, the thump of the piston, the jar of the ill-closed 'points,' drive patient listeners to hypocritical pretence of comprehension, while the effort of the persistent talker results before long in an acute attack of

'dysphonia clericorum.' But what do we hear on the coach? The road is dry but still elastic; the dawn showers have laid the dust without provoking the mud; a pheasant now and then whirrs off from the grass siding, and spins down the Devil's Punch-bowl to her nest in that perennial public-house that needs no licence; the wheels murmur rather than rumble, humming a *sotto voce* bass accompaniment to the music all around. The coachman's cheery chirp, seldom varied by the whistle of his whipcord, makes the gay cattle dance and shake the jingling chains of trace and splinter-bar. On they go, straight as a line, their fine summer coats, dressed like satin, shining in the sun, the corded veins streaking their arched necks, and the team as evenly together as *coryphées* in a ballet; they seem to make no effort as they tread lightly on the sweet heath-scented air, and to keep a merry trampling time to the pleasant music,—not with the heavy labouring plod of the underbred hoof, but as if their pleasure was to click gay castanets beneath their springy pasterns: and all at once comes the blast of the guard's horn and—wakes me from my dream. They are gone, ay, literally 'to the dogs.' The silky skins were tanned ten years ago. The active limbs have hung raw and horrible on the branches of the oak beside the kennel, till piece by piece they found

their last way into the hounds' broth; the mail degenerated to a stage, for the railways robbed it of its bags and red-coated guards; the thoroughbreds yielded to their destiny, and hung their heads as poor 'old stagers;' the harness rotted, snapped, met rough-and-ready mending with twine and whipcord, and 'went' at every buckle-hole, and then went altogether,—where? I suppose into the boot of the coach, when that rolled off the road for ever, destined no more to look for paint and varnish on the king's birthday, but, bare and weather-beaten, to stand on two wheels and three quarters in the paddock behind the inn yard, its ragged linings dropping down from day to day, and the privileges of an inside seat only disputed night after night by the opposing parties of the turkey and the pea-fowl.

And telegraphs, again, how convenient! how miraculous! How much more business can be managed! how much more money can be made! how much more time can be utilized! But then how utterly they skim the cream of news, leaving the poor skim-milk of 'further particulars' vapid and unstimulating as the second volume of a novel to the greedy reader, who has anticipated the *dénouement* of the story by reading the last chapter of the third!

Or take, again, the penny postage. It has its

marvellous conveniences, and saves such quantities of time; but how much more it gives us to do! The year before its introduction the Post Office carried seventy-five millions of letters; last year, 1000 millions, so that (putting samples aside) on an average we each write ten letters now for one we used to do. We have more time, but must do more within it; we find greater facilities for communication, but must communicate more. And so we have had to shorten our epistles but to multiply their number. And this brings us, as gossiping does not always do, to our special proper subject, slipshod English; for penny postage has destroyed the elegant art of letter-writing, as fast stipple-punching has destroyed the beautiful, laborious art of line engraving. The trick of speed has spoilt the habit of accuracy, and social history now-a-days is but chronicled in notes where it used to be detailed in letters. In the old days a letter was a work of art, a studied composition, a chronicle of news, an elaborate petition, or an urgent counsel; the note, its substitute, is now a hasty scratch, a written ejaculation, a cry, or a command. Our fathers used to draught their letters first, read them over to themselves aloud, checking off each smoothly balanced period with a waving pen, and, where need appeared, making erasures here and there with the blade of the pen-

knife, whose smooth reverted handle rubbed away the roughness of the scratched surface to pave the way for the more choice expression of their critical idea. Now, if he read his letters before posting, no man corrects his wording save by a hasty blotch and impatient interlineation, if even this be not left undone with the murmured 'Do well enough, he'll understand what I mean.' And this careless habit has spread also into literature, as who can wonder when we think of the greedy urgency of the steam press in journalism, and of the astounding fruitfulness of our greatest writers in general literature? It is to a few lapses in such matters, as illustrating one of the disadvantages of our modern rapid system, that I purpose now to draw attention, and to consider a few errors in style appearing in modern literature —not in any spirit of hypercriticism, but as specimens of a tendency which, if permitted, is not unlikely to spread farther.

Here, for instance, to begin with, is a passage from one of our most distinguished living historians, which nothing but haste of habit could have allowed to remain unaltered:—

'Elizabeth, from a mixture of motives, . . . hesitated to adopt and would not reject the means which were pressed upon her for preserving her throne, and she *laid*, with flapping sails, drifting in the gale.'

Of course, the marvellous confusion of metaphor here must strike anyone who quietly analyzes the passage and its meaning; although what the author intended to convey—the vacillation of Elizabeth at one particular crisis—is entirely unmistakeable. She is represented as unwilling to use certain remedies for certain evils, but not as being hopelessly and helplessly abandoned to evil circumstances. Yet no ship can drift in a *gale*, and at the same time have her *sails flapping*, unless she have become quite unmanageable; nor can she, under such circumstances, when she must be scudding under bare poles, be properly described as *lying* at all. But apart from the confusion of metaphor, which I shall consider in my next chapter, the special example of slipshod to be found in this quotation is the verbal one exhibited by the use of the word *laid* instead of *lay*. If this were a single instance in our literature the faulty expression would be scarcely worthy of critical notice; but the error, at least in conversation, is a very common one, and at the rate whereby perversions spread, might soon be defended as correct, and even established as classical, on the testimony of the very instance I have quoted.

Here is a slip from the 'Guardian' of March 25, 1868, extracted from a critical notice of Traill's Translation of Josephus:—

'The translation itself is in good and readable English, and displaces at once the queer and cumbrous work of Whiston, crotchety *as in opinion, so in his English also.*'

Surely our language is flexible enough to dispense with the necessity of using such a structure of sentence as that italicized; while the adverbial redundancy is absolutely unpleasant. It reminds me of a verse of a song I once heard sung by an ancient cricketer, and received with uproarious applause by his auditors. It seemed like a summoning up of the ghosts of the dead old time, to hear him quaver out a ballad made on the victory of Vittoria fifty years before, but which his rustic auditory evidently regarded as a passage from contemporary history. The following is the verse that specially took my fancy:—

'Two thousand (!) heavy guns *besides*
Likewise they took *also*;
Which caused poor Joseph Bonypart
To cry aloud, *Morblo!*'

Here, again, is a curious specimen of involved and indefinite diction, from the same paper and of the same date. The extract is entirely unabridged:—

'It is a perfect puzzle even to educated men, either literally to carry out the arrangement, or if they did, to divine its result, where, as *e.g.*, in

some colleges, two are to be elected by absolute majorities, from whom an external authority is to choose the actual Principal. The matter, we apprehend, is in such cases invariably arranged beforehand, and the minorities agree to give up their own men. How Mr. Hare can possibly dream of his own infinitely more complicated plan of "quotas," and of sifting out candidates, and of alternative lists, and the like, doing anything but turn all electors giddy with confusion of brain, it passes us to imagine. On this point, at least, a pamphlet written against his scheme by R. C., "*On the Representation of Minorities*," is conclusive in its criticisms.'

Perhaps the best comment to be made on this most extraordinary passage is to say, with special reference to the words 'giddy with confusion of brain,' '*Expertus loquitur*.'

Here is a bit from the 'Telegraph,' June 25, 1866, exhibiting a very general sort of error which writers and speakers alike should be careful to guard against:—'Retaining the colour of their uniform, they have replaced an ugly shako by one altogether as smart and soldier-like.'

'As smart and soldier-like' as what? We must presume an ellipsis, and that the writer meant to say 'as smart and soldier-like as the former shako was ugly,' but the necessity for such presumption

should be guarded against. And as this structure of sentence errs by deficiency, I will balance it by a specimen equally faulty, but erring by excess. It is the ill-sounding form, which seems daily to become more general in use, of saying, for instance, 'She is equally as amiable as her sister.' 'She' may be rightly said to be 'equally amiable with her sister,' or 'as amiable as her sister,' but 'equally as amiable as her sister' is surely a most clumsy pleonastic unpleasantness.

Here is even, to my mind, a worse form of this awkward structure. It is from the 'Times' of April 10, 1868 referring to the Austrian Government:—'It (the Government) entertains the highest regard for religious liberty, and would at all times be ready to afford powerful support to the authority of the Church; but *equally as* the Government has no intention of passing beyond the limits of State authority, *just as little* can it assist in this being done by others.'

In giving exact references of these various instances I adduce I must not be supposed desirous of 'running a muck' against a number of generally well-written and well-edited newspapers and periodicals, since the very fact of my extracting from them is a proof of the appreciation which makes me read them. I have assigned the occurrence of such lapses as I point out to the haste necessary

in providing intelligence of all sorts for the hungry readers of the present day, and though it be right here and there to point out errors as a matter of warning, it would be ungracious at the same time not to express the wonder which any reflecting man must experience in seeing how few and far between such errors are in the acres of literature which issue almost daily from the press. The hospital surgeon, as he points out to the students who accompany him on his visiting rounds the peculiar features of each case that meets his view, does not mean to sneer at the patients whose ailments supply material for his lecturing. On the contrary, while sympathizing with their sufferings, he cannot but feel at times a sort of undefined gratitude to the person whose condition supplies him with any peculiar points of interest to study and remark upon. And so, in fact, I view the few specimens of literary lapses which I am bringing forward.

The following is also a common but an inaccurate phrase, 'I do not doubt *but what* he will come.' Many readers will exclaim at once that this is a mere vulgarism, but it has made its appearance already in unexpected places, and been heard from highly educated speakers.

The present seems also a fitting opportunity to vent a snarl against the common use of the word

'*wert*' for '*wast*.' We find it everywhere, in novels and in newspapers, in poetry and in prose; and it certainly betrays one of the results of modern neglect of grammar. The greatest writers are not free from the error, who would yet feel indignant enough if supposed not to know the difference between the indicative and subjunctive moods.

Men are apt (at least, those who have not studied the subject) to take for granted that our earlier literature is uncouth and clumsy, and that its forms are a mere fortuitous medley, without rule or strict inflexion, but yet our earlier literature shows no confusion between the words *wast* and *wert* such as the present age displays; the Bible has the word *wert* only twice, both times in a subjunctive sense, always using *wast* in the indicative; and yet modern writers who would flush into a perspiration many a time at the thought of having made such an error in a Latin quotation, do not hesitate to publish its equivalent in English time after time. It is useless to excuse this as sanctioned by usage unless we should say that those who know best the grammar of their native tongue are bound to adopt and follow the errors which originate in the ignorance of those who truly know nothing on the subject. A man may be a good poet and a bad grammarian, and to say that 'thou

wert there' instead of 'thou wast there,' is to be right because Tennyson or anyone else has written it, would compel us henceforth to adopt such a monstrous verb as '*to wist*' into our language, because it has been used in a very beautiful poem which lately appeared in one of our magazines:—

> 'He wandered back
> Slowly, like one obedient to a power
> Whereof he *wists* not, to the home where once
> He had believed in love, and, as he deemed,
> In heaven.'

Another piece of slipshod which is very rapidly gaining ground, and which should be guarded against by all who can value the explicitness of our language, is that shown in the use of the words *either* for *any*, and *neither* for *none*. Both *either* and *neither* in their very form express an alternative; their proper correlatives are *or* and *nor*; and it is a gross, but unhappily also a growing error to apply them to cases of general, and not of simple alternative selection. Thus, for instance, a phrase like the following is so common as almost to attract no notice,—'The three sisters are all beautiful, but *neither* of them can be called accomplished.' Though the case be not entirely in point, it is sufficiently so to illustrate my position if I say that a similar error, and one obvious to the most careless ear, would exist in the expression,

'Of the twenty recruits who were measured he was found the *less* (or worse still, the *lesser*) in stature.' We have the right words, which I have given above, to apply in connection with the *either* and *neither*; why then should we give them up, only to deprive ouselves of the special explicitness which the genius of our language has provided for the necessities of those who speak it? If we push this practice to its extreme we shall more clearly perceive its error. Our careless writers have hardly ventured beyond using *either* and *neither* as implying one of three instead of one of two, but if this practice should obtain, there is no logical or philological reason against the expressions, 'Neither of the two hundred and fifty cases in the hospital recovered;' 'See whether either of the ship's company be on board.' This last instance could only be correct in such a case as that of the fisherman in a smack, who keeping the look-out while his only comrade slept, and requiring his assistance, shouted to arouse him, 'All hands on deck! Come up, both of us!'

A very common and very gross error is to be met with in the expression, which has turned up in my reading at least half a dozen times, 'an innumerable number.'

But this is too bad a lapse for a good writer who pretends to any sort of care in preparing his

copy. The following specimens, however, are taken from authors whose merits are deservedly great and proportionally acknowledged.

Here are two from one of our best and most popular writers, who has written sketches of representative clergy:—'He is always in a state of feud . . . against the Pope, who to him is a ravenous old *woman*, as to whom he cannot say whether *he* is *most* ravenous or *most* old-womanish.'

Apart from the peculiar uncertainty of gender which certainly would if strictly taken represent his Holiness as epicene, we have here an illustration of an error the exact converse of '*either* of the three,' namely, '*most* (instead of *more*) of the two.'

Here is another sentence, also involved in diction and faulty in grammar:—'The independence of an archbishop, and indeed to a very great though *lesser* extent of a bishop.'

Yet there is not much to be said against the implied error in the use of the word *lesser*. It is, after all, but an intensified comparative, no more to be censured than the scriptural epithet 'Most Highest,' and we find a sufficient warrant for it also in the first chapter of Genesis, where we read that 'God made two great lights, . . . the lesser light to rule the night.'

Here is another slip from an interesting article in the excellent 'Contemporary Review,' by a peer distinguished as a scholar:—'We hardly think the established usage *deserves quite* the *condign* censure which he bestows upon it.' Now the meaning of the word 'condign' is exactly *that which is deserved*, neither more nor less; there can be no degrees whatever of condignity; and therefore the censure is neither condign if not deserved nor exactly deserved if not condign.

The next instance I have noted is from that delightful writer, Washington Irving, and from one of his most delightful writings, 'Rip Van Winkle:'—

'His son Rip . . . was generally seen *trooping* like a colt at his mother's heels.' The word *troop*, though of disputed etymology, implies a multitude in every case; whether we assign it with some to the Latin *turba*, a *crowd*; with others to the Gaelic *drobh*, a *drove* (equivalent to the A.S. *drâf*, from *drîfan*, to *drive*); or even to the old High German *drupo* (modern *traube*), *a bunch of grapes*, all imply a number of individuals; and this the colt in his own person could no more represent than Rip Van Winkle himself clinging to his mother's apron strings, on any other principle than that of the Irish soldier, who on bringing in three prisoners after battle, explained the feat to his

enquiring captain by the simple statement, 'Sure, your honour, I *surrounded* them.'

I will close this section with a few newspaper instances. Here is one describing an unhappy accident:—

'A fatal accident to three of our country*men* is reported by the Swiss papers. Two young English *ladies* with their mother left —— in a carriage for ——. The horse took fright at a very dangerous part of the road, and *precipitated* the ladies over a *precipice*. The ladies were killed.'—*Pall Mall Gazette*, July 11, 1866.

Apart from the making the poor ladies out to be our country*men*, which possibly some readers, in these days of 'woman's rights,' will consider scarcely an error in description, to precipitate over a precipice, however literally accurate, is certainly a very slipshod expression.

But these errors of carelessness sometimes can be very startling. Witness the following extract from the 'Newcastle Chronicle.'

'Supposed Attempted Murder by a Wife.—At Coatham, near Newcastle, on Tuesday, a man named Michael Biggins was found *dead* in bed with his throat cut. Mr. Locke, surgeon, of Coatham, was immediately called in, and—under his treatment—the man is now progressing favourably towards recovery!!'

Here is one more from the 'Pall Mall' of September 12, last:

'A political demonstration which (says our correspondent) revives the memory of former Connaught elections, has taken place in the county of Mayo, in favour of the candidature of Mr. G. H. Moore. About one thousand men entered Castlebar, *each* supplied with a shillelah, *and headed by a band.*'

If, as we gather, there were a thousand bands of music present, while we pity the ears of Mr. G. H. Moore, we can fully credit the further statement that he was 'accompanied by an enormous number of supporters.'

Advertisements supply us sometimes with marvellous specimens of slipshod, which yet pass constantly undetected. We have all heard of the man who can be easily seen through, as being one who has a pane in his chest and his back, and to hear that a man 'wears his heart upon his sleeve' is not altogether beyond experience, but the degree of general openness implied in the two following advertisements introduces us to a condition of anatomy which we might fancy neither lady nor curate could long endure and live :—

'Furnished Lodgings.—A lady is open to hear of the above.'

'To Free and Open Curates.—Any such may

hear of a desirable sphere of duty by applying to ——,' &c., &c.

Of course our sex would be badly off indeed in its prospects if no lady were or should be 'open to an offer,' but this is a very different thing from being 'open to hear of the above.' And, again, we require some little special training to understand what 'free and open curates' are; free and easy ones we may have now and then made acquaintance with, but they are gentlemen few would advertise for; and open cannot here mean open-handed, since unhappily the possibility of being so is denied to most of our curates by the shameful scantiness of their stipends; but we may at least divine its meaning when we learn that a society exists for supplanting the pew system and promoting 'free and open' worship in churches, and conclude that the sort of curate advertised for is one who entertains the views upheld by that society.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON SLIPSHOD ENGLISH CAUSED BY CONFUSION OF METAPHOR.

Confusion of metaphor is to blame for very many instances of slipshod English. I have already, in a former chapter, pointed out the inaccuracy of the expression 'to tell a story,' while pointing out the fitness of saying, 'to tell a tale.' A similar specimen of slipshod is afforded by the expression, 'to take one's departure.' Of course this phrase is now so thoroughly naturalized, that none can fail to comprehend it; but it is nevertheless a corruption of the accurate form, 'to take one's leave,' which, in its turn, is an elliptical expression for 'to take one's leave to depart.' We have not to go very far back into the history of European nations to see the fitness of the expression. Time was, and in Russia still is, that subjects were only permitted to leave their country by special permission from the representatives of the sovereign; and we can find in-

stances in our early literature to illustrate the use of the expression of its extended and complete form. Such an instance we find in the romance of 'Sir Lambewell,' one of those beautiful old poems which have been restored to our literature by the recent printing of Bishop Percy's folio manuscript,—to the merits of which undertaking I gladly take this opportunity of directing my reader's attention. When Sir Lambewell's inexorable lady-love, rejecting her lover's entreaties, determines on leaving him, the author of the poem says,—

> 'For that they saw he made such mone
> The king and they prayed every one;
> But for all that ever he could do
> Not a word she would speak him to,
> But obeyed her (did obeisance) to the king so hend,
> *And tooke her leave away to wend.*'

(Apropos, let us gossip a moment on a slipshod perversion of this last verb, 'to wend.' 'To wend one's way,' is a perfectly correct expression; but the stilted style of novel-writing, now happily upon the wane, exhibits many instances of the inaccurate form, 'he wended his way,' caused by the writer's ignorance of the fact that 'went,' which we use as the irregular preterite of the verb 'to go,' is in fact the regular preterite of the verb 'to wend.')

But to continue our specimens of slipshod caused by confusion of metaphor. The following

is extracted from the 'Illustrated London News' of October, 1866, containing an obituary notice of a famous steeplechase rider:—'When he (James Mason) *won his spurs*, a steeplechase field were only shown their line in the distance,' &c.

Apart from the marvellous parsing necessary to make good sense of the latter clause in this sentence, we find the chivalric mataphor of 'winning spurs,' equivalent to 'gaining distinction,' most curiously misplaced here. If a steeplechase rider, under any conditions of the sport, had had no spurs, he could never have reached distinction in his profession. And while on the subject of riding I may give another kindred instance, taken this time from the 'Cornhill Magazine' for July 1866. In an interesting paper on horsekeeping we are told that 'the buyer (of a horse) may find himself *saddled with* a worthless animal!!'—a very painful condition indeed, to which my reading can find no parallel except in the state of the old gentleman in 'Æsop's Fables,' who, in trying to please everybody, actually undertook to carry his own donkey.

Of course abundant illustrations are to be found of this error, which, from their absurdity, hold their ground as stock anecdotes, and can recur to the minds of many of my readers. One or two, quoted by Mr. Jeaffreson—in his Book about Lawyers—as having emanated from Lord Kenyon,

are excellent in their way. 'If,' said his lordship, 'an individual can *break down* the safeguards which the constitution has wisely and cautiously erected, by *poisoning* the minds of the jury at a time when they are called upon to decide, he will *stab* the administration of justice in its most vital part.' And yet if we examine this supposed capital instance, we must admit that the speaker was guilty of no real confusion of metaphor at all. He erred not in the fitness, but in the superfluity of his figures. In a single sentence he made use of three metaphors, the sound of which is undoubtedly perplexing, but the sense of which remains clear because each metaphor used was complete in itself. But the same defence cannot be offered for the other instance I shall quote, which is indeed too amusing to need any sort of apology. In sentencing a butler convicted of stealing his master's wine, he thus described the culprit's conduct:—'*Dead* to every claim of natural affection, and *blind* to your own interest, you burst through all the restraints of religion and morality, and have for many years been *feathering your nest* with your master's *bottles*.'

This, of course, is a comical instance; but at the risk of appearing vexatiously hypercritical, I shall point to one or two occurring in the writings of great and favourite poets. Here is one which

I am almost afraid to find fault with, occurring as it does in one of the very grandest passages Campbell ever wrote :—

'Hope for a season bade the world farewell.'

Of course the meaning is that Hope abandoned the world ; and the almost universal use of the expression 'to bid farewell'—as synonymous with 'to depart'—suggested the poet's expression. But if we come to examine the line more closely we shall see that Hope, in bidding the world *fare well*, was actually giving it encouragement—leading it to expect some better things. If any other personified quality than hope had been represented in its place, there would not have been the same literal unfitness of expression, which exhibits thus an instance—if strictly taken—of metaphorical confusion.

But I let this instance pass, as knowing that very few will agree with me in finding any fault in the passage. I will turn to Byron, who may afford us an instance or two from the 'Hebrew Melodies :'—

'There,—where Thy finger scorched the tablet stone,
There,—where Thy *shadow* to Thy people *shone*.'

Many of my readers must have dreamed at times that they were either reciting from memory, or

improvising poetry, or even prose, of the most touching and eloquent description; I have awakened sometimes in my young days (or my young nights, to be accurate, for this fault-finding gossip may make some readers glad to catch me tripping) —I have awakened, I say, from sleep, with my eyes wet with weeping, moved by the imagined beauty of lines I found myself repeating or inventing, and, keeping with an effort the sound of one or two before my mind, have discovered that they formed but an unconnected tissue of independent words, rhythmical in structure, but simply nonsensical and absurd. I know not how far this may be the experience of others as to their sleeping poesy, but I am inclined to think that the same false idea prevails with many in less extravagant form even in their daily reading. And it is this habit of letting poetry pass scarcely noted through the brain, if it have succeeded in escaping challenge by the ear, which allows the error in such a passage as I have quoted to escape detection. *Shadow* can never *shine*; the idea is subversive of the first principles of optics; and, within a page or two of the same part of Byron's work, 'The Hebrew Melodies,' we find a curious complement of this oversight. In the piece entitled 'Saul,'—descriptive of the summoning of Samuel by the witch of Endor—a piece exhibiting in its very short

compass points of remarkable poetic merit—we find the following two lines, which we never yet found anyone to challenge :—

> 'Earth yawned ; he stood the centre of a cloud :
> Light changed its hue, retiring from his shroud.'

If light retired from his shroud, of course the shroud and the person it enveloped became invisible, which is anything but what the poet meant to say ; though making Samuel stand 'the centre of a cloud' seems to imply it also ; yet the great majority of readers, struck with the subject and Byron's graphic treatment, will read the short poem through and fancy they have fully understood it, though the two lines I have quoted really express the actual contrary of what the writer meant, and of what they understood him to mean.

We have a curious parallel to this error in Victor Hugo's beautiful poem commencing

> 'Dans vos hivers, riches, heureux du monde.'

And containing the following lines :—

> 'Peutêtre un malheureux, dans ces carrefours sombres,
> S'arrête et voit danser *vos lumineuses ombres*
> Aux vitres du salon doré.'

CHAPTER IX.

ON PECULIARITIES OF WORDS KINDRED IN MEANING.

We occasionally meet with a couple of words, each conveying, if not the same, at least a modification of the same idea, bearing some such striking resemblance to each other as to interest our passing attention, and leading us to feel that, had we time, had we patience, had we some sufficient preparatory acquaintance with the subject, we might trace out some still stronger resemblance, and thread with pleasure some attractive labyrinth of investigation. We meet such a notion in our conversation, or our reading; and as we hear or read, we often feel we should like to make a collection of such matters; time and the slight trouble of noting down the points as they occur would be sure to accumulate proof of the accuracy of our views, or their error, as the case might be, and materials thus gathered from hour to hour might be distilled to sweetness, rectified by experience, and

stored away, if only for our own private consumption in the pleasant form of a nectar of knowledge.

But unfortunately men do not generally read with a pencil in their pocket, or rather in their hand; nor do they patronise the plan of jotting down their daily notions as Pecksniff professed to do his nightly dreams. One book of reference, indeed, almost all the human race seems to indent with pencil-marks—the Royal Academy Catalogues. All 'round about and in and out' the exhibition-rooms the mighty crowd of honest critics who 'know what they like themselves' (and generally nothing further) wield busily amidst the surging crowd the pencil of appreciation. See (if you will, through my eyes, which saw them as it were but yesterday) that pretty girl with tearful glance putting down emphatic crosses, (as if playing at the noble game of tit-tat-to), against O'Neil's 'Night before Waterloo,' and there again that 'languid swell' in conchological pantaloons, (how else shall we call them, for they make his legs look like razor shells?) actually marking the numbers which meet his approval with a great new carpenter's pencil, which he can only have smuggled in as a walkingstick, since there is not a pocket about his person in which he could insert it without danger of starting a seam. These are single types of a class whose name is

legion. They go home and talk a little about the pictures, come once or twice more, till the stitches of their marked catalogue crack with its frequent crumplings, and the interesting work itself becoming absolutely shabby is consigned to the purgatory of the waste paper basket, or the Gehenna of firelighting. Such markings after all are but of little use. But if it were as general for men and women not merely to keep their eyes open, but by means of paper and pencil to provide a sort of mental store-room for points of interest that strike them in their reading day by day, they would be astonished at how much enjoyment and enlightenment they might be preparing for themselves.

Apropos of astonishment, let us take, as a simple instance worth noting, the class of words signifying the effect of sudden surprise, and see how every one of them are connected together with a fundamental idea which we can only express by a metaphorical reference to thunder. How often most people say they are 'astonished' without thinking of its metaphorical meaning; and how much more forcibly they express their surprise in saying they are 'thunderstruck,' while they use the very same word (which in yet another form they employ chiefly in a physical sense) when they speak of a person being *stunned* by a fall. *Astounded* is only another form of the same word, and

yet we have in fact a different meaning in applying each of these words though they all express the same original idea; while if we want really to say that a person has been literally *astonished*, *astounded*, *thunderstruck*, or *stunned*, we are obliged to use a periphrasis by saying, '*he was struck by lightning*,' so completely has the literal meaning been ousted by the figurative.

If we look a little further into the analogies of this class of words, we shall find them running, as so many do, through a whole cycle of languages. Just to cite the tongues with which most persons of ordinary education in the present day are familiar, we find the very same point illustrated. We have in Latin *attonitus*; in French *etonné* (in its older form still nearer to the Teutonic cognates, *estonné*) and in German *erstaunt*, all expressing the same idea, while in the modern instances, the French and German, as in the English, another word has to be found to express the literal idea, and we find *foudroyé* in the one and *verdonnert* in the other, both continually used in a figurative sense as well. We may also note in passing, that our language, in the exercise of its right to make arbitrary distinctions where those who use it will not adhere to proper analogies, seems to have nearly established a difference between the two forms *thunderstruck* and *thunderstricken*, using the latter to express the

actual sense of *blasting*, which the former, now meaning only great surprise, is no longer able to convey.

The fact of this usurpation of the literal to a figurative meaning occurring in so many languages naturally leads us to ask ourselves for some reason why it should be so. In the nature of things blasting by lightning must have always been a most exceptional event; one so very rare as to occur, if to the knowledge, at least not in the sight of one man in a million; moreover, that a person should be so stricken and yet recover must have been an occurrence still more exceptional; the use, therefore, of the word at first must have been almost as extravagant as the Irishman's expression for being hurt, 'I'm kilt intirely,' and we can only attribute its reception to the habit of exaggeration which seems natural and almost necessary to human speech, and which, so far from finding fault with, we are generally as little apt to be conscious of as we are to consider what greater exaggerations must exist in the outlines of an ordinary map. This tendency to exaggeration I purpose illustrating further when we come to gossip on the subject of expletives.

Let us now turn to another string of words, whose connection with each other most people are in some sort familiar with; I mean the names of measures of length, taken from the human body.

We may begin with the *hair's breadth*, and thence run through the names of *nail*, *inch*, *palm*, *hand*, *span*, *foot*, *cubit* (or *ell*), *pace*, and even *fathom*. It may be well to show the reasonableness of assigning the less obvious of these terms (namely, *inch*, *span*, *ell*, and *fathom*) to measures of the human body. *Inch* in the first place. This we have from the Latin *uncia*, signifying firstly an *inch*, the twelfth part of a foot, thence an *ounce*, the twelfth part of a pound, and finally, the twelfth part of anything whatever. Now this word is commonly referred to a Greek form *οὐγκία*, a further origin for which in that language we may seek in vain; Von Müller calls it Sicilian and Etruscan; but there seems to me good reason for assigning it a Latin birth, since by so doing we can find for it an intelligible etymology. And here in passing let me say how important it is not to allow ourselves to be nose-led by dictionary-makers, who necessarily must copy to some extent from one another. If we want really to get to the 'root' of a matter (above all things important in etymology), let us make a point of sifting evidences, and not be too ready to take matters for granted. We find this precious *οὐγκία* adopted by authorities as generally trustworthy as Scheler* and Messrs. White and Riddle;†

* Dictionnaire d'Etymologie Française, 1862.

† Latin English Dictionary, 1866.

and its acceptance, of course, would make the use of the word inch an exception to what the anology of other words of measure leads us to look for, a reference to some part of the body. It is, therefore, satisfactory, on turning to worthy old Schrevelius for a history of *οὐγκία*, to find him simply dismiss it thus: '*οὐγκία*, *uncia*. *Vox Latina*.' Thus we may speak in English of a man in Paris spending a thousand francs, but we should think it hard for that reason to be obliged to say the French word *franc* was derived from the English adopted word. Οὐγκία may therefore be dismissed from our minds altogether, and we may start fair for some other origin of the term *uncia*, and this I should refer to the root of *uncus*, a *hook* or *bend*, as signifying the top joint of the *thumb*.

No doubt there are many of my readers ready to cry out at such a far-fetched idea, and to say that on the same principle any one word may be derived from any other. But let us examine it a little further. What is the French word for an *inch*? *Pouce*, which also means a thumb. What is the derivation of *pouce*? The Latin *pollex*, a *thumb*; used sometimes in the sense of measuring.* And how is length to be measured by the thumb, especially a length representing about an

* Compare our housekeeper's expression for measuring approximately, 'by rule of thumb.'

inch, except by bending the thumb and measuring its top joint along the matter to be calculated? In connection with this I would note how all our terms for measures taken from parts of the body not actually self-defined, as hand, palm, foot, &c., apply not to the rigid, but to the flexed posture. *Cubit* refers to the length from the *bended* elbow on which one *reclines*. *Ell*, the Latin *ulna*, to the name given to the large bone of the arm, from the same point which the Germans call '*Ellenbogen*' and we '*Ell-bow*,' the *bend* * where the ell begins; *pace* to the oppositely *bended* position of the hip-joints, *span* to the oppositely *bended* joints of the thumb and wrist.

But doubtless my readers may say of me, 'Give this fellow an *inch*, and he will take an *ell*,' if I plague them longer about this one particular word; I dismiss it, therefore, with remarking that the use of the word *span* incidentally does away with one objection to my referring, as I have done, a *bend* in general to a *bend of the thumb* in particular. *To span* is *to stretch*, *a span*, any stretch whatever, and yet, in the absence of any distincter definition of the thing to which it is applied, we accept the general term as the measure of a *stretched hand* without any sort of hesitation.

We now come to show the corporeal measure

* Compare the shape and sound of the letter L.

implied by the use of the term *fathom*. It signifies, as we all know, a measure of six feet, and is now limited as a substantive to a nautical sense. We find the German of this word to be *Faden*, the general term for a *string* or thread. We can see a striking analogy between the German and English in the expression *Ein Faden Holz*, *a cord of wood*; but yet the words *Faden* and *fathom* both refer primarily not to a thread or cord which bind things together, but really to the space grasped by the outstretched arms. Of this we find the following convincing proofs; in the Old Saxon (Heliand, 90, 19) we have the form *fadhom*, signifying *the arm*, while Rask quotes the Anglo-Saxon *Fœthm*, in the sense of *an embrace*, and Björn Haldorson (in his Icelandic Dictionary) gives *Faden* as equivalent to *the outstretched arms*. If we want a conclusive analogy from a Romanic language we have but to look to the French equivalent for our nautical *fathom*, which we find to be *brasse*, from *bras* the arm; and if further we seek a reason why this measure should be named rather from the outstretched arms than from the stature of a man (these being generally of about the same length); we can but point out that the very act of measuring one's own length (except in the involuntary sense) would be performed with the arms rather than with the body.

Let us now turn to a class of words which have made themselves indispensable in our language, and will all, if closely examined, be found referable to a single idea, that of divination by signs in the sky, either of stars or of birds. I mean the words italicised in the following sentence: 'I should *consider* any enterprise undertaken under his *auspices ill-starred* and likely to end in *disaster*, and should *augur* most unfavourably for its success, if entrusted *in an evil hour* to one of such *sinister* aspect and *abominable* character.' Of course, most of my readers only require to have their attention drawn to this fact to find its accuracy obvious; but there may here and there be one for whose benefit I must give a few words of explanation, even at the risk of proving tiresome to the better informed.

Of these italicised words, then, which we may remark to be every one of Romanic origin, *auspices*, *augur*, *sinister*, *in evil hour*, and *abominable*, refer to the ancient system of presaging, not events themselves, but the probability of their proving favourable, from watching the flight of birds. In Rome there was an actual college of augurs whose business was not restricted to divination by watching of birds alone, as that of the *auspices* strictly was, but who had also to declare and interpret omens from other things such as thunder, lightning, &c.

By degrees, however, the *augur* and *auspex* seem to have become united in the same idea, though that some distinction existed between their functions appears from the following quotation from Ennius:—

'Dant operam simul *auspicio auguriisque*.'

We use the word *auspices* in a very incorrect sense, which the Latin by no means supports. The word is the plural form of *auspex* (a diviner of the flight of birds); the expression, then, '*under his auspices*,' would imply that the person spoken of employed a number of such diviners. The proper form would be 'under him as an auspex,' that is, 'at his instigation.' A familiar quotation or two will show this plainly; for instance, the following, for which see Horace, or any Latin grammar or Delectus:

'Nil desperandum est Teucro, duce et auspice Teucro.'

and this from Virgil:

'Diis auspicibus cœptorum operum;'

literally, 'the Gods being *auspices* of the works begun.'

The augurs were consulted before entering on any undertaking, whence we have the expression *to inaugurate* a building, an enterprise, &c.; and so important was the presence of some one of soothsayer kind, that at a marriage the 'best man,' or

'παρανύμφιος,' was called the 'nuptiarum auspex.' The best man now-a-days has rather different functions, his special business being to 'return thanks' for the bridesmaids, and to be to them a soothsayer, as a matter of course, of all sorts of favourable things. *Sinister* means unfavourable, because a portent, from which the augur or auspex drew his prophecy or *omen* (declaration), if seen on the left side, was unfavourable. To *abominate* means strictly 'to deprecate an omen,' a thing constantly done in Latin by using the words 'absit omen;' and having its equivalent still in Roman Catholic countries in the form of crossing one's self on hearing or seeing anything terrible, or in such ejaculations constantly used by the Irish peasantry, as 'The saints be about us,' 'God be between us and harm,' &c.

The expression 'in a good (or evil) hour,' though perhaps wrongly attributed to astrological use, conveys exactly the same idea, and is a form of *abomination*, or of deprecating an omen. To seem to make a boast of anything not actually due to our own powers or merits almost invariably gives the impression that the ground of boasting may be taken away; so, for instance, if a man say, 'I have admirable health; I have never had a day's illness;' one almost immediately feels inclined to say, 'In a good hour be it spoken.' For this the Latins would

have said something like, 'Quod faustum felixque sit,' and the Germans would say 'unberufen,' that is, 'not called for,' meaning 'may this not invoke ill health upon you.' The French have the very same idiom as ours, though they have come to apply it by way of encouragement, and no longer as a deprecation of evil.

Thus, if you relate to a Frenchman anything satisfactory to yourself or to him, he will say 'A la bonne heure!' much as we should say, 'Bravo, capital, well done!' That this form of expression, both in French and English, should be generally, and with some show of reason, assigned to an astrological source, arises from a very natural confusion of the two superstitions, augury and astrology, such as has caused the Old-French words, bonëur, malëur, to be spelt with an interpolated *h*, as *bonheur*, *malheur*. The astrologist drew a *horoscope* for a new-born child, from which the idea naturally came that the *horoscope* being favourable the child was *well-houred*, and should be happy (*heureux*), or have happiness (*bonheur*). But then we see that no one ever attempted to spell *bonheur* as *bonneheure*, which would have been the consistent course on such a supposition. So we must look for another origin, which lies nearer, and is to be found in the Provençal, *aür*, syncopated from *augur*, *augurium*. So the Provençal has *bonaür* (good

augury) and *malaür* (evil augury), for happiness and misery, and the Old-French had almost the identical form, as I have already shown. Thus our saying 'in a good hour be it spoken,' truly means 'be it spoken under a good augury,' and is equivalent to the Latin form of 'abominating' or deprecating evil—'absit omen.'*

We may note further, as analogous to the French 'good luck' expressing *happiness*, that the very word *hap*-piness implies the idea of *chance*, as well as the German equivalent, which is *Glück*, and that the French word for luck itself is 'chance.'*

I proceed to note the other terms drawn from astrology proper. Let us consider first the very word *consider*. It is derived from the Latin *con*, *with*, and *sidus* (pl. *sidera*), a *star*, and has reached its present use from the study of the relative positions of stars to each other under astrological observation. By the way, as I have had occasion to note already in the case of other words, we come sometimes with unconscious and instinctive accuracy to use these old forgotten metaphors with singular fitness. Of this we can have no better illustration than the use of this word *consider* in the eighth Psalm—When I *consider* Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the *moon* and the *stars*, which Thou hast ordained.'

* Contracted from *chéance*, *a falling*; compare '*casting* of lots.'

Of course, I need hardly explain the meaning of the words *disaster* or *ill-starred*, after this indication of their astrological use. The expression 'in the ascendant' is also self-interpreting; but it will occur to few persons to note that our common word *aspect* is used also in an astrological metaphor. The expression 'to view,' or 'to present a thing *under* a favourable aspect,' proves this to be so; the figure becoming a different one when we are said to regard a thing *in* various aspects.

The original connection of singing and dancing has supplied us with a number of words taken from the latter proceeding to express the former, or *vice versâ*, much in the same way as we find professors of one art, for want of better words, using the terms of another to express the merits of their own. How fond the musical critics are, for instance, of characterising a performance as 'destitute of light and shade,' while a fantasia is designated as *brilliant*, or a comic song as *flashy*; so the Germans use the word *Coloratur* for a musical embellishment, and we even hear the heroic metaphor of 'a composition of sober complexion;' the sister art returning the compliment by speaking of one colour *harmonizing* or *according* with another, of the *tone* of a picture, on the *toning* of a photograph; whilst the irrepressible slang which has favoured us with *a flashy song* can counterbalance

it with the appropriate description of *a loud waistcoat.*

Even thus singing and dancing have adopted the same words, which for our convenience we have slightly varied, keeping *ball* for a social dance, *ballet* for a theatrical one, and *ballad* for a song. It is beside my present purpose to go into the exact derivation of the Italian *ballare*,* a dance, from whence these terms descend, though I cannot help noting how badly off people can be sometimes for a root, when we find Wackernagel deriving it from the fact that in the Middle Ages as well as among the Greeks the game of ball was played with accompaniments of music and dancing! It is unquestionable that singing naturally accompanied dancing, and that, in turn, amongst the bards forcible action was used to illustrate song, so that there is nothing more surprising in our calling a piece of lively descriptive verse by a name signifying a dance than in our calling a piece of music a waltz or a polka. The analogy goes still further, for we find the words *chorus* and *choir*, which we only apply to singing, taken from the Greek χορός, which properly means

* It probably comes from the Rom. *balla*, a ball, from reference to its shape, as giving the idea of circulation. Hesychius makes the Greek word χορός, a dance, equivalent to κύκλος, a circle.

a dance. Thus, it might be etymologically accurate, though productive of dire confusion, to call the 'ladies of the chorus' 'ladies of the ballet,' and the absurdity of Box in the farce calling on Cox to sing a *chorus*, might have its linguistic justification.

We may carry this analogy further still by noting that the word *jig*, which now only means a sort of dance, used to be applied to pieces of poetry of the ballad sort. Thus it occurs in Hamlet (Act II. Sc. 2.); and a specimen is given in the newly printed Percy Folio MS. (vol. ii. pp. 334 seqq.) under the title 'A Jigge.' A reference also to some of the earlier translations of the Bible will show us 'The Ballad of Ballads' printed for 'The Song of Songs.'

It will add one to former illustrations of the manner in which our language, if retaining at all two real synonyms, takes care to assign to them distinct offices, if I note how marked a difference we make in our use of the two words *chorus* and *choir*, the latter being now almost exclusively applied to ecclesiastical singers. This is one of the great advantages which our language derives from the fact of its admixture of many elements, and goes far to compensate us for the want of that marvellous plasticity which enables the Germans to form words at will out of the elements of their own language to fit and define any shade of idea.

Indeed, we may even go further, and say that our tongue has actually waived the privilege of manufacturing compounds because it can provide equivalents for them by a judicious use in varied forms and various senses of the words it takes from other tongues. Of course, *Finger-hut* and *Handschuh* (*finger-hat* and *hand-shoe*) are words which are not merely signs but definitions of what they signify, but if we had not the simpler and shorter *thimble* * and *glove*, we might use the compounds ourselves with as good reason as we speak of a *jam-pot* or a *cork-screw*. And in the instance before us, *chorus* and *choir*, we are actually better off than either our French or German neighbours, who have only the word in its single form *chœur* or *chor*, to signify any body of singers whatever.

There is this remarkable peculiarity to be noticed in the whole class of words by which we refer to something to be done after a short interval of time, that the expressions all in their strict sense ignore the implied interval altogether. If we want a thing done by a person engaged in something else, we get for answer 'I will do it *presently*, *immediately*, *directly*, *anon*;' now every one of these words properly mean on the spot, without any delay whatever; but common usage has so altered their signification that not one of them bears the

* Der. from *thumb*, on which tailors still wear the thimble.

sense of what should be their equivalent, *now*; on the contrary, they all imply such a qualification as is implied in the expression '*just now*.' This variation of sense is of the same sort but not so extreme as that which really brings a word or a sentence at times to signify the very contrary of what its sound implies. As an instance of a word doing this, I may cite *synonym*, which properly means a word of exactly the same meaning as another, a sense we retain in the adjective form unchanged, when we speak of one expression being synonymous with another; but when we talk of a book of synonyms we mean really a book which points out the differences, often immense in detail, between words whose resemblance is possibly of a very limited nature. We can, again, have no better instance of a sentence being universally used in a way entirely contrary to its meaning than the common one of 'he speaks through his nose;' for it is just when the nose is held, or the nostrils obstructed, so that neither sound nor air can pass through, that the nasal twang is produced which we describe in terms so diametrically opposed to fact.

The charlatan (literally *chatterer*, whose title we have well translated by the onomatopoetic word *quack*) may illustrate by means of his servant's functions a numerous class of words, such as

Merry-Andrew, Jack Pudding, Hans-Wurst, Zany, Toadeater, and Buffoon. The first-named explains itself; *Jack Pudding* is a literal translation of the German *Hans-Wurst*, the pudding in either case referring to the sausages, or the pretended sausages which the Merry-Andrew always appeared to be swallowing by the yard or fathom; *Zany* (Zanni) is but the Italian for *Jack*, being abbreviated for *Giovanni*, just as *Hans* is the termination *Hannes* of *Johannes*. Toadeater had its early signification also from the horrible things which the quack's familiar pretended to swallow. Just in proportion as the quack laid claim to supernatural wisdom was his servant required to pretend to supernatural silliness; well trained in his profession, and being, of course, far more knave than fool, his duty was to show most obsequious reverence to his master, and never to hesitate a moment in obeying his most extravagant commands. At the same time, to collect the crowd his master was to cure, and to keep them together when collected, he was obliged entirely to forfeit every claim he might have ever laid to native dignity and the respect of his fellow-men. A similar motive, often attended with a similar result, makes the term toadeater fitly apply to a servile flatterer. This same trick of pretending to eat reptiles, such as toads, has been held by some

as the origin also of the term buffoon, buffoonery, from the Latin *bufo*, a toad. I give the notion here for so much as it is worth, at the same time observing that it is a disputed point of etymology into which, for many reasons, it would be unprofitable for us to enter at present.

Before the old infantry musket be so totally forgotten in these days of weapons of precision as that its very name of 'Brown Bess' be lost to meaning and to memory, it may be allowed me to record the origin of its appellation. The *brown* is merely an alliterative epithet, the *Bess* being equivalent to the German *Büchse*, applied to a rifle, a box; the French *buse*, a tube; the Flemish *buis*. We see its use still in the words blunder*buss* (properly thunder-buss) and arque*buss*, &c.

CHAPTER X.

ON SOME CURIOUS ANALOGIES OF DERIVATION.

THE fact that, whether noted or not, the immense majority of our sentences are figurative rather than literal, will naturally account for the extraordinary similarity to be found in the figurative forms and expressions of many languages. Some of these instances, and in fact a great many, arise from the necessity of the case, the same idea in various tongues obtaining the same expression; but many, on the other hand, are simply literal translations from one language to another, or from some older source into two or more modern languages. Some are children by blood, and some children by adoption; but they are many more in number than we are at all apt to observe. For example of the first I may adduce a common instance. The verb to *read* means also either directly, or in some very slight modification, to *choose*, or *gather*, in Greek, Latin, German, and French. Greek λέγω, Latin

lego, French *lire* (*élire*, to *choose*, *elect*), German *lesen* (*aus-lesen*, to choose). Even in English we find the same word in almost universal provincial use; namely, in the dialectic expression to *lease*, signifying to *glean*. This similarity can of course only arise from a common origin, of which it forms an illustration as effective in its way, as so-called irregularity of form does in the instances which all the five languages I refer to exhibit of having no regular positive equivalent to 'good,' for the comparatives *better* and *best*. The Greek ἀγαθός, the Latin *bonus*, the French *bon*, the German *gut*, the English *good*, have no structural affinities whatever with their respective comparatives and superlatives. Another such peculiarity, noteworthy in languages so distinct as German and Latin, namely, that the word signifying 'he eats' is the same as that signifying 'he exists,' may give an instance, on the other hand, of analogy by necessity, both languages, either in themselves or their ancestors, thus showing the early acceptance of the axiom that food is essential to life.

But the analogies I purpose briefly alluding to in this chapter are not so obvious as these, and I merely put them forth as curiosities, not as depending upon, or suggestive of, any structural theories whatever.

The first I notice gives us an instance of trans-

lation from one language to another, and suggests also the fact of some sort of tradition being lost which gave the term its origin. I mean our name *Woodroof*, for the plant asperula odorata. Webster's (the only dictionary in which I find any attempt to explain the derivation of the term) simply refers it to *wood*, and *ruff* or *roof*, which, as far as meaning goes, only amounts to telling us what we know already, that the word consists of two syllables; and yet a few lines above he has given the real origin of the word under 'wood-reeve, the steward or overseer of a wood.' Of course, *reeve* is a word familiar to all readers of the Robin Hood ballads or Sir Walter Scott's novels; it is derived from the Anglo-Saxon *gerefa*, and is thus equivalent to the German *Graf*, a count, and signifies 'one in authority.' We have the expression still in the word *sheriff* (shire-reeve), whose business to the present day is to put the king's writ in execution. But what bears on our present subject in the matter is, that we find the German name of the same plant to have a precisely similar meaning, its form being *Waldmeister*, the master of the wood.

A somewhat similar analogy is to be found in the German word for a wren, of which we have happily retained the legend though our term is not equivalent. In Ireland, as in England, St.

Stephen's day is that of a massacre of the innocents in the hedgerows, probably in celebration of the fact that the saint was stoned to death, a method the most universally used against the birds on a day generally observed as a holiday, and spent as many holidays are, in a woful effort to get over the time. On that day every old gun, musket, pistol, ay petronel, and arquebus, if such things still exist, is taken down from the hook, and the whole country vibrates with perpetual detonations. But still there are more idle boys than ancient guns, and many have to do their yearly sporting with the only weapon they can find, and pelt sparrows, wrens, and robins all the day long with stones and pebbles. Now these sportsmen combine the looking for Christmas boxes with their sport, and pass from house to house begging for contributions, calling themselves 'the wren-boys.' They sing a sort of charter song, much in the same way as Christmas mummers, and to the following effect, though my memory does not serve me as to the 'ipsissima verba:'—

> 'The wran, the wran, *the king of all birds*,
> St. Stephen's day was caught in the furze,
> Come give us a bumper, or give us a cake,
> Or give us a copper for Charity's sake.'

Now this very idea of the wren, one of the smallest, being called the king of all, birds, finds a striking

analogy in the fact that his German name is *zaunkönig*, the *hedge-king*, and that his name in French is *roitelet*, the *little king*, and in Latin *regulus*, with the same meaning. The origin of this peculiarity of nomenclature was most probably the little yellow crest or crown on the head of that tribe of wrens, which we distinguish by the name of the 'gold-crest,' but the name itself no doubt suggested the well known legend of the birds agreeing to choose as king the one who should soar highest; the eagle having overtopped all competitors, and having reached the highest point in his power, was ousted from the throne he had hoped to gain by a little wren, which, having sheltered under his wing, was able to soar higher than himself and so to claim the crown he ever since has worn.

Let us turn to another analogy for the elucidation of which we must have recourse for a moment to schoolboy slang. I mean that suggested by our word *stuff*. Now this, though in its original meaning, signifying 'matter' in general, we use contemptuously as characterising some tale or statement either absurd or incredible. In this sense the Germans use an equivalent, the word *zeug* and *stoff*, literally 'material for production;' and hence (as is also the case with our word stuff) signifying a texture of any kind. But they

prefix an adjective to it, '*dummes zeug*,' *stupid stuff*. What we should call 'twaddle' they call also *kram*, a word properly applying to the multitudinous wares which a pedlar (krämer) carries in his wallet for sale. Now, in the sense of something incredible or absurd the schoolboys call a statement a *cram*, and they even have the phrase to '*stuff one up*' with a story in the sense of making one believe a falsehood. Is it not then a striking analogy that the only legitimate use of the word *cram* in English should be to *stuff full*, as we speak of cramming a carpet bag, or to feed excessively, as we speak of cramming fowls? But we can carry the analogy still further. If we look for the French word to *stuff* (as fowls for table, &c.), we find it *farcir*, and *stuffing* itself we find to be *farce*, the very word which we only use in a dramatic sense as applied to a ridiculous play.

A similar analogy may be found in another couple of familiar expressions which we use to express contempt of something told us. I mean the semi-sanctioned *fiddle-de-dee!* and the unqualified piece of slang, *bosh!* Why on earth we should say fiddle-de-dee in the sense we do, I cannot undertake to explain; but it is a singular coincidence that we also, when desirous to be more emphatic than elegant in expressing the same idea, use unconsciously as exact a synonym as if we

said, 'Oh! violin!' the word *bosh* being, in fact, the pure gipsy word for *fiddle*.*

We have another curious pair of words in different meanings; *beetle* and *calender*, which may be worth a little observation. The process of preparing linen, now done in what is called a beetling mill, has always also been carried on, on a small scale, by pounding the linen with a sort of mallet, much like a cook's rolling-pin provided with a handle at the end, or still more closely resembling a brass roasting-jack turned upside down. This instrument goes by the name of a *beetle*; and its most natural derivation is unquestionably the word to *beat*, exactly describing the use to which it is put. Where large quantities of linen had to be treated, another method was used for shortening labour, and the mangle in its various forms was introduced. It became further necessary to glaze the linen by an extension of the process, and so the art of *calendering* was introduced, which required the use of *cylinders* filled with hot coals. Now nothing can be more reasonable than to suppose that the word *calender* came from *cylinder*, a deri-

* Since writing the above, I have met the following as an editorial statement in the 'Public Opinion,' for October 31, 1868:—'Perhaps the only word which we are undoubtedly (?) indebted to Turkish for, is the word *bosh*, which means *empty* in that language.' My kind readers must settle this point for themselves.

vation which all the etymologists refer to, and some seem to have made up their minds upon; yet it is curious to find that the word *calendre* in French, and *Calendra* in Spanish, is the name of a sort of *beetle*, and doubtless applied to that insect ages before anyone thought of supplanting the primitive *hand-beetling* of linen by machinery. It would be entering on a conjecture, the truth of which cannot be proved, to suggest that the general shape of the insect, the head representing the handle, and the body the thick, round part of the instrument, gave the name to one or other; but it may be worth while to mention, as a sort of support of this conjecture, that the form of our word *calender* or *calander* places certain difficulties in the way of derivation from the Greek κάλινδρος.

I may end this chapter with another word and its analogies without bringing my readers too deeply into derivations. It is the word '*sleeper*' applied to the logs of timber on which railway metals are laid. We have the French *sommier*, signifying both a main beam in a building, on which most others rest, and a mattress, and analogous to this we have the French word *sommeil* for *sleep*. We find, again, the word *Bressumer*, or *Brestsummer* in English, as implying much such a beam; and it may be that from such analogy the word *sleeper* has been taken. It is, however, right to say that

the word *sommier*, a beam, seems more reasonably referable to its other meaning, 'a beast of burden' (as we say a *sumpter*-mule), and that the heavy beam takes its name from the burden it supports; much as we also speak of a clothes-*horse*, a towel-*horse*, while the French call such matters *chevalet* (cheval, a horse), and the Germans *bock*, a buck. A further investigation of this point gives us also a further analogy to reflect on; the French word *poutre*, a beam, being derived from *poultre*, a colt.

CHAPTER XI.

DIALECTIC EXPRESSIONS.

THERE is no more striking proof of how little men think on the subject of language than the contemptuous manner in which most people talk of dialectic expressions, or the readiness with which these are classed as essentially vulgar and despicable. Nothing betrays more complete ignorance of the nature and history of language than the ready condemnation, as equally barbarous and low, of every term and phrase which does not happen to form part of our ordinary literary language. For it shows that such classifiers are simply unaware that the literary language of each nation is only one out of many which by some special favour and peculiar fortune has been adopted for general use in preference to its fellows. There is not a county in England, so to speak, which has not a language of its own, and frequently, too, an unwritten grammar of its own, just as systematic and

justifiable as the forms which Lindley Murray or any other exponent of our literary language may have endeavoured to fix and illustrate. Nor, while any living language remains, as it must, liable to continual change, casting its withered leaves and putting forth its green ones as autumn and spring-time follow in their courses, can anyone be justified in calling its forms and idioms, however universally adopted, either fixed or final.

While our literary language has been growing age by age, forming new words, and by gradual change modifying, and even in some instances reversing the meaning of old ones, many other English languages, akin to it indeed, but independent of it, have been passing through the same stages, with this marked difference, that want of literary use has prevented the succession of such stages from being noted, and has made the history of such dialects harder to trace than that of the tongue we use ourselves from day to day. The same thing occurs in every language we know anything about. The physical conformation of different tribes, different families, even of different individuals, affords a key to original divergencies of pronunciation at least; but whatever the causes be, the fact is certain, that round about each literary language is grouped a multitude of different dialects, which are only con-

temptible in so far as their use is limited and their peculiarities unstudied and undefined.

The Latin language, at one time so widely spoken, was but that of one little district in Italy, and owed its wide acceptance to the gradual rise of the tribe who spoke it to become the rulers of the world. The French, again, was but the language of a few, who grew to be an overwhelming multitude, and is only the winner in a race for which there were many starters.

Much the same thing may be said of the modern High German, which owes its final triumph over the Low to its having formed the vehicle for Luther's translation of the Bible; and yet there are many evidences in the literary activity of the last hundred years, of how fully capable many a German dialect, however generally despised, can be of giving beautiful and apt expression to fine and touching thought. The 'Beetle' of the old Nuremberg tinman, Grübel, the beautiful Alemannic poems of Hebel, Klaus Groth's admirable 'Quickborn' in the Ditmarsch Plattdeutsch, Von Kobell's songs in the Tyrolese and Bavarian dialects, may show how thoroughly these varying forms of so-called vulgar speech can echo the heart-music of the poet born; while their fitness for prose writing can be easily illustrated by reference to the charming and original novels of Fritz Reuter in the

Mecklenburgh dialect. The extent moreover to which they are used in fugitive and little-noted literature will appear from the most cursory examination of 'Deutschland's Völkerstimmen,' by Firmenich, or Fromman's 'Deutsche Mundarten.' Something of the same kind may be found in Dr. Barnes's excellent productions in the Dorsetshire dialect; and though it be indeed a Quixotic idea to suppose that any exercises in or illustrations of a special dialect could ever aim at supplanting the established literary idiom, the proof is ready and convincing that the supposed vulgarity of dialectic language, *per se*, can only be evolved from ignorant and unthinking presumption.

Dialects, as compared with literary languages, are like rough diamonds measured against brilliants; they are common pebbles to the million, possible treasures to the few; or, to take a Californian illustration, they are the sands which thousands of feet have trodden with fatigue and weariness till some one skilled observant wayfarer has marked the long unnoticed signs which made him cry, 'These sands are sown with gold.'

I do not purpose entering here into any details as to the divisions and history of our dialects, but shall only call attention to some expressions

among them which may possibly amuse or interest my readers.

The first I will note is an illustration of the unconscious accuracy sometimes to be found in a dialectic expression. Meeting an old woman on her way to a fair shortly after hopping, a time when most of the hoppers put what the philologists would call the protractive prefix *s* before their hopping and go shopping, I said, 'Well, Mrs. Trusler, off to town? Going to spend your fortune, I suppose.' I got the answer, 'Ah, Sir, it's most all gone already; I've bought me a *pegg*, and I've paid up my rent, and I've settled my shop bill, and now I've only sixpence left, and I'm going to spend *they*.' Of course she should, to be perfectly accurate, have said to spend *them*; but most educated people would have looked on the 'sixpence' as a noun of singular number, and have said, 'I'm going to spend *that*.' There is a reason of course to be found for this exceptional accuracy in the fact that pennies are individuals to the poor, while the rich are accustomed to regard them chiefly in a collective sense, but notwithstanding old Mrs. Trusler would have had the better of the strict grammatical argument in favour of her form of speech.

How deplorable many people think the ignorance which leads a countryman to say to a friend, 'Well, Jim, and how be you?' and to receive the answer,

'I be very well, Tom, I thank'ee; and how's yourself?' And yet these two sentences are correctly spoken, though not in the idiom we use in literature. These rustics, for the most part descended from ancestors innocent through ages of the alphabet, and uninfluenced by the changes which affect our written language, have simply in such expressions preserved, and that in a most wonderful way, the traditional utterances which have come to their ears from the Anglo-Saxon times. The Anglo-Saxon language has two distinct verbs, signifying *to be*, *wesan* and *béon*, the latter only occurring in the present tenses of the indicative and subjunctive moods. These tenses of each verb I subjoin, in defence of Jim and Tom's accuracy.

Inf. wesan, to be.	*Inf.* beon, to be.
Ind. Pres. eom, I am.	*Ind.* Pres. beo.
eart, thou art.	byst (pron. beest).
is (ys), he is.	byd (pron. beed).
synd (syndon), we, you, they, are.	beoth and beo.
Subj. Pres. Sing. sy, I thou, he, may be.	*Subj.* Pres. Sing. beo.
Plur. syn, we, you, they, may be.	,, Pl. beon.

From this my readers will see that while we have blended these two verbs together, using the forms of *wesan* for our indicative, and those of *béon* for our subjunctive, the uneducated classes have merely retained those of *béon* in both moods, and only

adopted those of *wesan* occasionally, probably in answer to persons addressing them in the more literary way.

If we look to the analogy of the German language we find a curious converse from our English practice. They use the equivalent to *béon* in the indicative mood, *ich bin*, *du bist*; and the equivalent to the *wesan* forms in the subjunctive, *Ich sei*, *du seiest*, *er sei*.

Thus we see that in finding fault with the rustic for using such sentences as I have given, we betray our own ignorance of the ground forms of our language, and that it is only the suitability to our own ears, not the grammatical accuracy of their speech, that we can have a word to say against.

'But,' some stern critic may ejaculate, 'there is another part of the sentence you have given us which admits of no defence; you make Jim answer Tom, and then enquire in return, "How's yourself?"' Yet, after all, is this not right? If we analyze the word *your self*, we shall see that it must be treated in the same way as 'Your Grace,' 'Your Lordship,' or 'Your Majesty;' and to say, 'How are your Grace?' or 'I hope your Majesty feel very well,' would be both an awkward utterance and an uncomfortable hearing. Jim or Tom, of course, think nothing of being right or wrong; all they use their tongues for is to convey a meaning to each

other; but yet in all unconsciousness they speak words correctly which many better taught than they would hastily condemn.

Another instance of unconscious accuracy in a dialectic word, and, on the other hand of unnecessary correction of the same in our literary language, is to be found in the use of the word *airy*, so universal amongst servants to express what their masters are accustomed to designate by the term *area*, meaning the little forecourt of a town house. We find the word *aere* in German (but little used) in the sense of a vestibule. Its origin as given by Grimm makes it synonymous with the Latin *area*, a threshing-floor, because this was generally in front of the house;* and we find the same word for a threshing-floor in the French *aire*, which justifies what we are apt to call the error of the lower class in talking of an *airy*. In fact, they have kept the word in its proximate French or German form, while we, unconscious of its use in those tongues, have gone back to its remoter origin for an explanation of its meaning.

In one more point I am able to show the accuracy of dialect, namely, in the pronunciation of local names. Educated people for the most part lose sight of the true word-structure in pronouncing

* Compare our word '*thresh*-old' (in Early English 'threxwolde') and its cognates.

the names of places ending in *ham* (home) preceded by a *t* or an *s*. Two successive parishes of which I have had charge bear the respective names of Frensham and (North) Waltham. I think I may say that without exception the upper classes pronounce these *Frensh-am* and *Walth-am*, while the lower orders as universally pronounce them *Frens-ham* and *Walt-ham*; and the latter are unquestionably right, this division being the only one that conveys a meaning with the names. This accuracy is all the more striking when we remember that the dialects of West Surrey and of North Hampshire, in which these places are situated, both almost totally neglect pronouncing the letter *h* at all. I have had from time to time the utmost difficulty in getting village school children in either place to produce the aspirate sound, so entirely is it excluded from their dialectic idiom; in fact, I have frequently had to make a whole class breathe rapidly upon their slates before uttering the syllable to make them give the educated pronunciation to such a word as *hat* or *head*.

This subject leads me to ask a startling question, namely, 'Who wrote "Cock Robin"?' We all know, or ought to know, who killed him; but if we could have any means of finding out that it was a Dorsetshire man who wrote his story, I for one should rejoice, as finding one of the critical diffi-

culties of my earliest years removed. That heart-rending epic having set the universe enquiring who should dig the grave of the murdered robin, replies,—

> 'I, said the owl,
> With my spade and shovel
> I'll dig his grave.'

But how are these first two lines to rhyme? Every other corresponding couple in the poem rhyme: the sparrow has an arrow, the lark can be clerk, the bull can pull—or the bul can pul, as the case may be; even the *throosh* may be made rhyme to *bush*, or the *bussh* to *thrush*, and *sobbing* may pass as an echo to *robin*, but we can't call the owl an *ovel* to make him rhyme with *shovel*, and so we have to do as I did when a little child myself, and say,—

> 'I, says the owl,
> With my spade and *showl*
> I'll dig his grave.'

Now this very word *showl* is the Dorsetshire word for shovel, and keeps a vowel sound analogous to that occurring in its German equivalent, *Schaufel*, of which we keep the form in shovel, with a different pronunciation.

The form of many dialectic expressions used by the rustics shows a striking analogy with those

used in ordinary German, which, as most of my readers are probably aware, is a language capable of indefinite extension by means of simple juxtaposition of terms. Thus my old parish clerk would speak of a couple whose banns had been published for the third time as being 'out-asked,' and of the chancel door being 'off-locked,'—forms which, though entirely dialectic in our language, would be perfectly natural and correct in German. But one of the most striking resemblances of this sort I have met is the expression 'to break up' a letter, in the sense of opening. A country-woman complaining to me of harsh treatment which one of her daughters had met with in service, laid special stress upon the fact that the girl's mistress had 'broken up' a letter which arrived for the maid in the family post-bag, and seemed not quite sure whether this flagrant proceeding did not render the inquisitive lady liable to an ignominious death upon the gallows.

Sometimes we find a dialectic expression very useful in guiding us to a derivation. The slang phrase 'dowse the glim' might puzzle many an enquirer to understand save by the context. I know it was of frequent use amongst the 'fellows' when I was a little boy at school in Brussels. It signified 'put out the light,' and probably was introduced by some youngster who had read 'Jack

Sheppard.' I seem to recall to mind the chief occasions when we used it. On Saturday nights in winter, we in the 'little dortoir' (that is the dormitory of the youngest boys) used to sit for a couple of hours after our regular bedtime round a red-hot stove (no other dormitory had such a good one: we called it Fireball). There we huddled together in a hot ring, each with his lean little feet in a foot-bath, and each with a book upon his knee, so that, to any master coming in, we might appear in our long night-shirts a set of studious little angels, too good for the world we lived in. One held a Latin grammar, another the 'Jungfrau von Orleans,' a third the 'Cours de Littérature,' a fourth a dog's eared dictionary; for we were very good and studious little boys on Saturday nights. But if a master had entered and examined any one of those instructive volumes, he would have found them to contain more than was vouched for by the table of contents. In one part between the leaves he would have discovered some limp tiny cards, and in another a numismatic collection laid out flat, chiefly consisting of 'cents' and five-centime pieces, and had he been able to put these curious facts together he would have found that 'the little dortoir' were playing 'speculation' under pretence of washing their 'poor feet.' Though, however, we made all these preparations, they never could bear the test

of an interruption. A footstep in the corridor was enough to cause a general and terrified whisper of 'dowse the glim,' and in an instant we were left with nothing visible in the room but the dull red stove and a circle of lurid ghosts around. How well I remember after one of those alarms when some of us were making believe to be drying our feet with unnatural energy, how one backed up against old Fireball, smiting our souls by an awful shriek of pain, and arousing our indignation afterwards at finding that all the harm done him was the disorganisation of a piece of epidermis the size of one of the five-centime pieces which fell spinning over the floor from the admirable volume he had been studying before his accident. With our feet wet, our hearts throbbing, and half the cards and coppers about the room, we rushed into bed as well as the darkness caused by the 'dowsed glim' would permit us, and, marvellous to say, were not discovered by the shriek; but we were frightened off from 'speculation' for many a Saturday afterwards.

But I hear some one cry, and not without some reason, 'Quo ruis imprudens vaga dicere facta?' And, in truth, in stirring up a childish remembrance of a quarter of a century old I have gossiped off very far from the derivation of the word 'dowse.' It is from the dialectic verb *dout*, to *do*

out, *put out*, formed in a similar way to the obsolescent verb we still employ—to *don*, *put on*, and to *doff*, *put off*, a coat, hat, &c.

Having done with *dowse* let us examine the word *glim*. It is of course a modification of the word *glimmer*, an uncertain light, and cognate with *gleam*, as verb and substantive; but it gives us an opportunity of comparing the two words *glance* and *glimpse*, both of which signify a hasty survey. We find *glimpse* in the Alemannic dialect of German in the form *chlimse*, signifying a chink or crevice. Thus it occurs in Hebel's beautiful poem 'Vergänglichkeit,' in the passage where the father is setting forth to his son the gradual course of decay that must at last overtake even their own dwelling :—

'Io wegerli, und's Hues wird alt und wüest;
Der Rege wäscht der's wüester alli Nacht,
Und d'Sunne bleicht der's schwärzer alli Nacht
Und im Getäfer popperet der Wurm.
Es regnet no dur d'Bühne ab, es pfift
Der Wind dur d'Chlimse.'

'Our home must yield to age and slow decay,
The washing showers shall waste it night by night,
The sunshine dim its brightness day by day,
The worm shall burrow in the wainscoting,
The rain shall drip at last from floor to floor,
And the winds whistle through the crevices.'

We may thus reasonably assign the word *glimpse*

to what may be seen in a rapid peep through a crevice, while the word *glance*, signifying something shining, refers rather to the eye that sees, that flashes back a sort of reflection over the scene that meets it. This sense of glance we still retain exactly in the expression 'a glance of triumph,' 'a glance of affection;' and we may rightly say 'he glanced at his friend,' 'he saw it at a glance,' while 'let me get a glance at the newspaper' would be a faulty expression.

Let us next get dialectic usage to help us in correcting the commonly accepted spelling of the word *curb* in the sense of a framework round a well, or the edging-stone of a pavement. This should be, and occasionally is, spelt *kerb*, *curb* being only accurate in the literal and metaphorical sense of holding in or restraining a horse by making him *bend* his neck.

If we ask a woodman to measure a felled tree, or even the short wood he has cut off in trimming it, he will say, 'It measures so and so, not counting the *kurf*.' Now this 'kurf' is the slanting part where the wood has been cut off, and is the same word as the German *kerbe*, the edge. The unchanged word is used in the same sense for the edge of a well, &c. (though the dictionaries make no reference to this analogy), and should consequently be similarly spelt; but the collateral

idea of restraint has led to the error of making it identical with the Romanic word curb, a curve or bend, which is generally assigned as its origin, though a kerb or edging of a footway proper is generally without any curve whatever.

We find a curious analogy in the North-country dialectic expression *helder* for *rather*—both meaning *sooner*. Most of my readers are aware that the word *rather* is the comparative of an obsolete word *rathe*, soon, early; * *helder* (elder) is in its turn the comparative of *old*, and both terms in the sense of preference have their exact synonym in our word *sooner*.

The words *leer* for hungry and *clem* for starvation may be simply explained by a reference to their German correlatives *leer*, empty, and *klemmen*, to pinch. *Rook*, again, is the same as the German word *rauch*, smoke, though I doubt whether most people in reading, for instance, the following couplet from Campbell's 'Lochiel,'—

> 'A merciless sword o'er Culloden shall wave,—
> Culloden that *reeks* with the blood of the brave,'

* 'This is he that I seyde of, after me is comun a man which was made before me, for he was *rather* than I.' Wickliff's Trans. St. John, chap. i. (Note in this passage how *before* is made to denote precedence in rank, and *rather* priority in time.) Compare further our word *puny* (Fr. *puisné*, later born), with *ainé* (*avant-né*, born before); and its application in the expression 'a puisne (inferior) judge.'

quite understand that to reek means to smoke. *Rooky* bacon, again, is bacon which is black from having been hung in smoke, and a sweep is dialectically described as having 'a rooky face.' May we not hence derive a more satisfactory explanation of the bird *rook* (A.S. hroc) from its colour, than the commonly accepted one which assigns it to *raucus*, from the hoarseness of its voice?

Sometimes we find a dialectic perversion prove an economy in language. For instance, the verb 'to hollo' is a neuter verb, and we can only rightly speak of one man holloing *to* another. But the country-folk make it an active verb and save the preposition. Thus one night, in driving past a cottage where I wished to leave a message, I shouted to attract attention, and on the door being opened, was greeted by the enquiry, 'Who's that hollerin' we?'

The mention of the word 'hollo' calls to my mind some of the peculiar expressions used for leaving off work. In the north of Ireland the general term is 'quitting'† time; but the ploughmen and carters, who have to do with horses, use a still more graphic and definite expression; they call it '*lousing*' or '*loosing*' time, the time at which

* Compare one of the many derivations (and by no means the worst one) of the word *dinner*—Fr. *dîner, disner*; Lat. *desino, I leave off.*

they *loose* their cattle from the yoke. Somewhat analogous to this, but less comprehensible without explanation, is the phrase among hop-pickers in the south of England. According to them five o'clock is called 'hollering-time,' the time when they cease from labour. 'Why do you call it hollering time?' I asked a picker once. 'Why, Sir, they hollers "no more poles" at five,' was the reply; signifying that the pole-pullers, who have to supply the pickers with poles, cease pulling at that hour, and the picking must consequently come to an end when the poles already pulled are stripped of their hops.

This far-fetched phrase reminds me to note an instance or two of far-fetched names, as affording a sort of explanation of the many aliases borne by country-folk, whose nicknames come to be at length regarded as their real ones. (Let me remark in passing that the word *nick* in nickname is cognate with the German word *necken*, to mock, to quiz, and the English word *nag*, to tease, provoke). I had a family in my parish once whom I supposed for years to bear the name of Romsey. The children were called little Romseys, their father young Romsey, their mother Mrs. Romsey, and their grandfather old Romsey; but I found at last that their true name was Groves, and that they had only obtained the other appellation because the

old man had originally come from the parish of Romsey. Such an instance may help to explain the fact that there is scarcely a village in England which has not given its name to some family. But this curiosity of nomenclature is far outdone by the following. I had buried an old man, whom we will call Brown, at the ripe age of ninety-three; and on remarking his great age to the clerk, he said, 'His brother is older still, Sir.' 'What brother?' I asked, 'Why, Master Jumper, Sir, as lives at such a place.' 'But how can Master Jumper be a brother of Master Brown?' I enquired; 'they have different names.' 'Oh yes, Sir; but Jumper's only a sort of a by-name; his right name's Brown. 'And how came he by the name of Jumper? has he borne it all his life?' 'Ever since he was quite a young man, Sir; he got it by his wife.' Now I knew that old Jumper could never have married an heiress and changed his family name for her money, so I was puzzled into further enquiry, which elicited the story that this Brown, as a young man, had been 'keeping company' with a damsel of whom he grew tired, and who, on his declining to marry her, had flung herself down a well to put an end to her existence. She was, however, brought up alive, and the force of public opinion, which is a pretty strong thing even in a little country parish, had induced young Brown to espouse the fair

maiden who had taken his coldness so much to heart; 'and so, Sir, you see,' concluded the clerk, 'that's how he was always called Jumper from that time, *because his wife jumped down the well for him*'!

We may further note, in connection with our present subject, the expressiveness of some dialectic phrases. Can there be a better definition of a prosy preacher's style than to say that 'his voice is like a dumbledore in a warming-pan'?—a dumble-dore meaning an humble-bee. The word is varied in some parts to *dumbledrane*, equivalent to *humble drone*. Apropos, it may be interesting to give an explanation of the term 'humble-bee,' as there seems a common doubt whether this or 'bumble-bee' be the correct expression; the latter form has in its favour the alliterative line,—

'Abominable bumble-bee with its tail cut off,'

which some of my readers may recognise as a nursery saying. 'Humble,' however, is the right word; and the subjoined 'bee' is, strictly speaking, pleonastic; for we find in German *Hummel* (derived from the droning sound the insect makes) to signify 'humble-bee.'

How expressive, again, is such a phrase as 'the incoming ground' for the down-hill part of a

journey, or a 'cobweb morning' for such a misty morning as shows the hedges and furze-bushes covered with gossamer! Again, how well the phrase 'all in a hoo,' 'all in a clutter,' expresses our idea of confusion and disorder! This idea has another and a French term singularly common in dialectic use; a country-woman in excusing the disorder of her cottage when the parson or any other visitor drops unexpectedly in, will say, 'Everything's in a *dishabille*, Sir.' I remember meeting with a good parallel to this in Ireland. A sheep had been killed and carried away by night from the park of a neighbour, and one of his men in describing his pursuit of the thieves, said he tracked their footsteps to a certain spot where they seemed to have come to 'a sort of a *faux pas*.' This particular man was a pensioner from the Life Guards, and may have first picked up the expression from London gossip or newspaper reports; but the fact that others repeated it from his mouth may afford us an instance of how such words from time to time insert themselves into a language.

Illustrations of the influence of one language on another in countries where both are generally spoken will appear in many American dialectic expressions, which show the genius of the German tongue affecting the spoken English. I just quote one example in illustration, which shall be that of

an American farmer describing his shooting equipment as consisting of 'a scatter-gun and a brace of smell-dogs.' Had he been writing and not talking, his phrase would have been 'a fowling-piece and a brace of spaniels;' but he followed the natural instinct of one accustomed to hearing around him the German language (which is capable of infinite expansion by the formation of compounds), and manufactured for himself the two expressive composites I have quoted.

How curiously, again, has the trick of 'beating about the bush' in evasive, unsatisfactory speech got the dialectic name of 'pramble talk,' from the word 'preamble'!

The other day a worthy parishioner of mine, talking of a couple of young people about to be married, said, 'Ay, Sir, they used to go up to school together everyday when they were little ones; we always said as they'd be a little *two*,'—meaning a *pair*. Now this, by analogy, helps us to understand the peculiar derivation of our word *toe*. The word is the singular of *ten*, used in the same way as the military expression 'three's about,' &c. Having formed an irregular singular from the plural word *ten* (the number of the toes), we have made an apparently regular plural therefrom by the subjoined *s*. The accuracy of this statement is manifest from the form of the plural

being really identical with *ten* in the other Teutonic dialects; thus in German we have *zehe*, a toe, plural *zehen*, toes, or ten. 'On tiptoe' in German is '*auf den zehen*'—*on the ten*, which would, in fact, be the form we should expect the word toes to take in Anglo-Saxon. Chaucer, as we shall see, has it as *tone* for *toen*; and such an expression we can illustrate simply enough by reference to a person 'going on all fours,' also described in German in the words '*auf allen Vieren*.' I venture to transcribe here the treatment of the word *toe* in two of the great dictionaries—Richardson's and Webster's,—to show in the case of the former how nearly right a man may be and yet go astray, and in both from how far a derivation may be fetched, and at how long a range a random etymological shot may be erroneously supposed to hit its mark. Richardson says,—

'Toe. Piers Plowman * writes the plural *ton*. Chaucer writes it *tone*, *i. e.*, *to-en*; Dutch, *tee*, *teen*; German, *zaehe* (*zehe*); † A.S. *ta*,‡ which the etymologists derive from Greek Τα-ειν, *extendere*, from the

* This is a good instance of the general ignorance on the subject of Early English. Piers Plowman was an imaginary character, whose vision was narrated by Langlande, and no more a writer than Nicholas Nickleby or Little Dombey.

† Had he inserted the plural *zehen* he could not have missed the right derivation.

‡ Pl. *taen*, ten.

A.S. verb *teon*, to extend, to expand, *or from "ten," because that is their number.* It is probably from *teon*, to *ta*ke; applied first to the *ta*lons or claws of an animal'—as if a term meaning to expand could be applied to the toes, which cannot be expanded or extended!

Here is Webster's etymology:—

'Toe. [Sax., *ta*; Germ., *zehe*; Sw. *tä*; Dan., *taae*; Fr., *doigt du pied*; Lat., *digitus*. *Toe* is contracted from *tog*, the primary word on which Lat. *digitus* is formed, coinciding with *dug*, and signifying *a shoot.*]'

But I must cease this treading on lexicographers' *toes*, and pass on to some other subject of gossip, merely noting in the dialectic name of *margs* for the tall branching meadow daisies one out of many instances of retention in dialects of foreign words which have either never existed or have become obsolete in our own written language. *Marg* is of course an abbreviation of the French word *marguerite*, a daisy.

CHAPTER XII.

ON WORDS NEWLY MADE OR NEWLY APPLIED.

THERE are many persons whose intentions are excellent, and whose principles are perfectly sound upon philological points, who yet are very apt to lose their heads on the subject of newly formed or newly applied words. This chiefly arises from their overlooking one fact most important in its relation to this particular subject, namely, that words being only added to a language when a true necessity for them is felt, those whose necessity prompts the coinage no more pretend to be philologists than the man who in case of need gets a cork from a bottle with a piece of string pretends to be a maker of patent corkscrews. The bottle-opener wants the cork out; failing better means he uses a string, or whatever else his need and his invention suggest to him. The word-maker wants an idea expressed, and his need and his invention produce a word as a sign of that idea,

which, however much a makeshift, answers its purpose. Once made and set going, it gets the start in our language—a matter of such prime importance that by the time a philologist has been found to manufacture the correct term, he will find it no more needed than the patent corkscrew after the contents of the bottle have been drunk. However correct the term may be—the necessity for it no longer existing—nothing can be harder than to get it into general use ; for language of its very nature rejects superfluities of expression, as is evident from the fact of so few real synonyms (that is, words meaning *in every sense* exactly the same thing) existing in any language whatever. Even in a composite language like our own, wherein we have numberless Teutonic words, in structure exact equivalents of Romanic ones also in our vocabulary, the abhorrence language has to superfluity—like that of nature to a vacuum—leads unconscious usage, as if by some instinctive direction, to limit the application of one or other of the seemingly synonymous terms, and to render possible some definition of their difference. Unless this be done one or other term gains predominance, and ruthlessly tramples its unyielding rival into the thick and stifling dust of ages. A very striking instance of this may be drawn from two admirably expressive Early English words corre-

sponding in meaning to our modern terms *presumption* and *despair*, in the religious sense : I mean the words *overhope* and *wanhope*. They are beautiful words, pure in origin, pathetic in accent, direct in application, and distinct in definition ; but they are gone for ever from our spoken language,—and why ? Because the pulpit speech, based so broadly on Latin, supplanted them ; and their Latin synonyms having once got ahead of them in ordinary usage, ended by eclipsing them altogether.

Many of my readers will remember how much debate was occasioned by the introduction of the word 'telegram' some years ago. There were plenty of faults pointed out in its structure, and plenty of substitutes proposed for it by the fault-finders. Several of these substitutes were doubtless better and more correctly formed ; but, in the words of the old epitaph, 'physicians was in vain ;' the term was made, launched, accepted, adopted ; and, however unwillingly, the purists had to yield to the utilitarians in speech, and end the dispute with the true though unconsolatory reflection, 'fugit irrevocabile verbum.'

The same thing has occurred in the introduction of multitudes of words into our language, though without attracting any notice or meeting with any opposition ; words whose structure is totally unjustifiable on strict philological grounds are made

by the ignorant to express their ideas. They get a start in the language, they supply a certain want, and, having served a good purpose, the language overlooks their inaccuracy in gratitude for their efficiency; it receives them as guests, adopts them as children, and finally assigns them an actual birthright, in the same way as it often takes a wandering alien term from some other tongue to fill a vacant place by its own fireside, and naturalizes it in time among its true-born offspring.

In this introduction of new words, moreover, the incorrect expression really has the better chance of acceptance, and for two reasons,—firstly, the odds are vastly in favour of its being wanted and consequently made by an unscientific person rather than by a philologist; and secondly, it has not only a start, but a very long start, of the more accurate term. It almost invariably becomes general in conversational use before it appears in literature; it regularly germinates, buds, blooms in conversation; and it is mostly in the form of a fixed result, as a sort of gathered fruit, that it takes its place in written speech; while the better word which might supplant it must, to change my metaphor, raise but a baby hand, and utter a trembling cry against the strength of maturity and the shout of a man.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON NEW WORDS MADE, OBJECTED TO, OR WANTED.

The statement made in my last chapter as to the manner in which new words are introduced, not only into our own, but into all languages, may possibly be construed into a justification of every word which any person, learned or unlearned, may choose to launch into a vocabulary; and were this admitted to be the case, would deprive us of any logical grounds for objecting to even the most frivolous and contemptible innovations which might at any time be attempted. What I have stated, however, may help us to see the fallacy of such a deduction; since, whatever the theory of word-structure may be, the fact of a word being wanted, while it may shelter an ill-constructed, can never justify an unnecessary one; and we may do well to remember, as a consolatory fact, that language will not tolerate any entirely useless expression. A speaker or an author may, of course

at his own sweet will, introduce any word he chooses, which, however formed, his readers or hearers may comprehend either from its context or from its composition; and that word should of course appear in any dictionary professing to be an index of all words contained by (say) the English language. But this does not make it an English word a bit more, than a traveller's statement, that he had paid a German hotel-bill in thalers, would prove a thaler to be a coin of English currency. For example, let me take a word used by Chapman, the great translator of Homer, but so far as I can ascertain, used only by him, and probably only once. It is to be found in his commentary on the second book of the Iliad, where, comparing Virgil with Homer, he says: 'Virgil hath nothing of his own but onely elocution; his invention, matter, and forme being all Homer's, which, laid by a man, that which Virgil addeth is onelie the work of a woman, to *netifie* and polish.' Now, Chapman's new word *netifie* suits his context well; it is expressive, it is intelligible; his special eminence as a poet and a scholar might lead one to suppose his authority sufficient to bring such a word into general use, as many poets and scholars before and since have succeeded in doing with words they introduced; but *netifie* was not necessary, and so it has pe-

rished, a dead-born child, its very existence only known by its entry, so to speak, in an old, forgotten register.

The same destiny has befallen many other attempted additions to our written speech; how many, nothing can give us an idea of till the Philological Society publishes its great Dictionary of the English language. I will give a parallel instance of a German word-fabrication from the nineteenth, as Chapman's *netifie* is from the close of the sixteenth century.

In the year 1835, a German actor named Jerrman* wrote a book describing his experiences and his quarrels at Cologne. A more trenchant, and at the same time a more witty and entertaining work would be hard to find, and, unquestionably, it was widely read at the time of its appearance. In this work he undertook to construct an epithet to signify the clique of his antagonists, as in algebra x or y is used to signify a number or quantity, and so he called them by the general term of 'mentecaptische Jünglinge.' But the word, as may be supposed, was not wanted, and

* Jerrman's remarkable talent may be judged from the fact that, enraged at his speaking of French being laughed at, he undertook to represent, within a twelvemonth, on the stage of the Theatre Français, Talma's greatest characters, and actually achieved his wonderful task with the most signal success.

probably has never been used, even as a quotation, from Jerrman's time to our own. And this is, of course, the fate of most words merely made to serve a purpose.

Many of my readers will remember laughing over one such freak of the lamented Thackeray, in describing the Rev. Charles Honeyman and his doings. He mentions how the reverend gentleman had once been presented with a teapot full of sovereigns by his admiring congregation, and goes on to say, 'The *devo-teepot* still remains, but the sovereigns—where are they?'

Akin to such an instance, though neither so entertaining nor so directly intelligible, are such expressions as the following, which I take from the 'Contemporary Review' for May, 1868. At p. 140, in a critique upon a theological work, I find the subjoined sentence:—

'Far better is the next part of his address, where he shows that Mr. Bennett and the Orbicular essayists have departed not only from the teaching of the fathers and divines, &c.'

Now, what is the meaning of the word *Orbicular* here? A dictionary will tell us, 'circular, round, in the form of an orb,' but that gives us no assistance whatever, since we can scarcely suppose the essayists mentioned to be all of aldermanic proportions (like the unfortunate deputation of Palatine

bakers celebrated in Nadler's famous song,* as having waited on a minister to solicit the fixing of a higher price for bread, declaring themselves unable to live at the low rate they were compelled to sell at, and who, poor fellows, were answered by the minister with the ready words, 'Why, gentlemen, don't say you're starving, only look at yourselves!') No, the word orbicular, printed with a capital initial, is but a reference to the name of the Rev. Orby Shipley, one of the more prominent of the essayists under notice. Of course, such a word as this is but a nickname, which might or might not have 'stuck' to those it was applied to. *Omniversality*, a word used in the July number of the same publication, may, on the other hand, obtain adoption, and be sanctioned by use as being a word in some sort necessary for simplifying such an expression as 'comprehensive versatility;' while yet another word, from the same excellent publication, is both witty and expressive, I mean 'platitudinarian,' in the number for February, 1868. There is another new word, of much the same character, which also may have a chance of coming into use, from the absence of any other word expressing its meaning. It occurs, as follows, in the editor's, Mr. Furnivall's, preface

* Die Deputation. Nadler's Frôhlich Palz.

to 'Russell's Booke of Nurture,' published this year by the Early English Text Society. 'I do not write for men in the depths of that *deducated* Philistinism which lately made a literary man say to one of our members, on his printing a book of the fifteenth century, "Is it possible that you care how those barbarians, our ancestors, lived?"' The word coined here, 'deducated,' supplies the want its writer experienced of a single term to express, not the absence—but the misdirection of education in such persons as he spoke of.

This leads me to note a few examples of words wanting in our language, the absence of which compels us to a frequent use of periphrastic expressions. The number of such deficiencies is of course very great, nor is the present a fit occasion for presenting any systematic list of them, which, after all, could never be an exhaustive one. I will simply call attention to three or four.

The Germans have a word *Geschwister*, signifying one's *brothers and sisters* collectively. Now, this meaning no single English word can convey. The phrase, 'How many are you *in family*?' can only suffice in the case where the persons referred to are known to have neither parents nor children; and the only way in which the German question, 'Haben sie Geschwister?' can be translated into English is, 'Have you any brothers or sisters?'

How much, again, we want some word as convenient and expressive as the neat French term '*personnel*' (which the Germans have also, at least as a compound, in the word *Dienst-personal*), for the individuals of every class concerned, let us say, in the managing of railway traffic. To express such an idea, we have to beg, borrow, and paraphrase in a way which, after all, is never complete or comprehensive. We may use a military metaphor, and speak of a person 'on the staff' of the railway, or a diplomatic one, and speak of an 'attaché,' or we may simply say an 'official,' but which of these expressions could we properly apply to a lamp-cleaner or an under-porter? How, again, would the superintendent of one of our great lines like to be called an 'employé' merely, or its treasurer or auditor to be classed among the persons 'in its employment,' or numbered among the company's 'servants'? But such a word as *personnel* can, without any sort of equivocation, include every class of individual engaged on such an undertaking.

Another wanting word, which after all is much more necessary than either of those I have cited, is an equivalent to the Latin *verisimilis*, and the French *vraisemblable*. Our poverty of expression for this idea is remarkable. We may say, 'the thing has an air of truth,' 'it looks reasonable,' or,

by using an elliptical phrase, may come nearer still to the true sense of the term, in saying 'It seems likely' (*sc.* to be true), but, after all, none of these give the exact equivalent to the term *vraisemblable*. Yet, our German neighbours possess and use the exact synonym for it in the word, '*wahrscheinlich*,' which we invariably translate by 'probable,' a word conveying a different idea altogether. We must, I fear, despair of getting a true equivalent for *verisimilis*, and that from the structure of the word itself; to form it according to proper analogy would give *verisimilar*, the sound of which, instead of *like truth*, would signify *very like*, and therefore that word, of which one instance at least is to be found in our literature, has altogether failed of acceptance. It is too late in the day to introduce such words as *truthlike* or *true-seeming*, though these be nearest to an unequivocal translation of the term, and so, I fear, we must be content with borrowing the French word and printing it in italics, till long use makes it English (as has been the case with *etiquette* and multitudes more), and the compositors dignify it with Roman type, making it merge in the privilege of its adoption the badge of its descent, and (like the charity-boy when he leaves off his school suit) become more respected in becoming less conspicuous.

It is fashionable to fall into fits of fury against

some of the newly made words in the language, as deserving reprobation on account of their structure. Now, if this be done in time, it is right, and may be useful; but, as I have before shown, it is utterly hopeless once a word has got a footing. Here are a few words, as instances, which have been objected to: *talented* (which after all is wrongfully accused of being a new word, it being really a revived one), *ventilate*, *enlightenment*, *reliable*, *desirability*; surely, no sane man can see a possibility of ousting any one of these words, however faultily formed, from a language which needs to express their meaning, has no equivalent to supply their places, and, in fact, employs them universally in speech and writing, day by day.

But there are better grounds for objecting to words for which equivalents already exist. Why, for instance, should the language endure to be saddled with such an unnecessary addition as 'querulity,' given us by the 'Pall Mall Gazette,' under date of June 27, 1866; or, as 'gratefulness,' used by the 'Oxford Times,' an excellently written paper, in its issue for August 29 of this year? Useless though many of such variations are, it is astonishing how little notice they receive, and how often they succeed so far in crowding themselves into notice as, at all events, to make a person hesitate between using them or the better words whose places they try to take. Doubtless there

are some of my readers who have been reduced by such hesitation to write both terms which occur to them down on their blotting paper, and to allow the eye to select the more familiar and correct form which the puzzled ear could no longer accurately distinguish.

Some words we find used in a sense so new to ourselves that we fancy they must be incorrect. Here is a specimen, from a report of the trial of President Johnson: 'There was (on a certain day) only a *slim* attendance.' We are accustomed to this word only in two senses, one conveying the general idea of *slender*, slight in figure, the other being the particular appellation of a sort of teacake, called *slim* cake, probably from its thinness. Yet the expression 'slim,' as applied to attendance, is nearer the original meaning in which the word came to us than either of the senses in which we are wont to use it. It does not strike us as awkward to say, 'there was a *thin* attendance,' which is equivalent to the ordinary meaning of *slim*; and still less do we object to the expression, 'a *bad* attendance,' which is the sense in which we first received the word, from the German *schlimm*, *bad*, its root idea in that language probably signifying *crooked*, *irregular*.*

* Compare with this the analogous prime meanings of *light* (*schlecht*, bad), and *slender* (slanting, out of right line, irregular), both which words we apply to the human figure in the same sense as *slim*.

The following extract from Barrow, on the Pope's supremacy, will show the earlier use of the word, analogous to the American one: 'The Church of Rome, indeed, was allowed to be the principal Church. But why? Was it in regard to the succession of St. Peter? No; that was a *slim* excuse.'

The question may then suggest itself: How should the word *slim*, having lost in English its first meaning, *bad*, come to be used again with that meaning in the phrase we are examining? And the answer may be found in the fact that enough of the German element is mixed with the English, both in American speech and writing, to account for this unconscious restoration to its right use of a word like this before us.

Some preposterous attempts are made from time to time to invent euphonious terms for things which common words seem to express too plainly. One example of such word-fabrication we may find in the heading of an advertisment (which occasionally appears in the 'Times') of a home for drunkards. *Chronic Alcoholism!!!* I say nothing of such refinements as 'dipsomania' and 'kleptomania,' for drunkenness and shoplifting when indulged in by the upper classes, which are all very well so far as they are understood, but there is something sublime in clothing the meaning of

'habits of drinking,' or 'habitual drunkenness,' under the pathetic periphrasis of 'chronic alcoholism.' Fancy the word in common use ; fancy the poor blowsy, red-faced, shaky-kneed drunkard on his way to the lock-up, with his greasy cap half off his shaggy head, trying to be dignified and angry at the same time, and getting, to his spluttering enquiry—'Now, then, policeman, what do you mean by this ?'—the laconic (?) answer of his captor, 'You're alcoholised !' Such a word, so applied, might frighten the patient into a fit, or else immensely exalt his notion of the dignity of drink, which can earn a man so magnificent an epithet.

On a par with this, but even less comprehensible, is the word *alienist* ; the meaning of which must be a mystery to most men until they have it explained. Of all the monstrosities of words, this is one of the most impertinent. We must go a long way round for its meaning. We know what an alien is, we can understand the word alienate, and it is an intelligible, though circumlocutory statement, that 'a person is suffering from alienation of intellect'—a rather long way of saying what a noble critic of our day has expressed in the more concise phrase, 'the man is off his head.' Well, then, there are people for whom the word *madness* does not exist, for whom even the word *insanity* is not grand enough, who first coin the

phrase 'alienation of intellect,' and finding it too long for convenience drop off the tail of their sentence, and use the word 'alienation' alone, to express madness. Men of this sort hesitate to speak of a 'mad doctor' (which indeed is a most equivocal way of describing one whose speciality is the treatment of the insane), and so they actually use the word 'alienist' to express such a physician. If our language could, without notice or protest, accept so ridiculous a term, we should soon be little better off than the builders of the tower of Babel.

The subject of words mismade leads one naturally to that of words misused, a few examples of which, becoming daily familiar, deserve to be noted. For instance, we see, continually, descriptions in the newspapers of a *residential estate* to be sold, meaning a property with a suitable residence upon it; the expression is a silly one, but yet conveys a definite meaning, and answers a sort of purpose; but there is another instance in which, by implication, people insult themselves continually; I mean the phrase in which governesses or housekeepers in search of situations describe themselves as 'thoroughly domesticated.' The natural inference, of course, is that they have passed from a savage to a civilized condition, and that a time has been when they might fitly have

been described as wild beasts. They mean to say they are homely, sociable, domestic in character; but then *domesticated* is two syllables longer than *domestic*, and must, it would seem in consequence, be a much superior word. Akin to this is the expression of the newspaper reporter who, in attempting to describe ladies' dresses at a ball, informed the world that 'Mrs. X. Y. Z. was *habilitated* in a robe of white satin,' and of the relieving officer who declared that a man neglecting to provide for his family was '*amendable* to the law.'

The word 'demoralize,' again, bad enough in structure, has reached to utter absurdity in application. The American war and its usages brought it into general use as a gentle term for 'rout,' or 'put to flight,' and a story is told of a cowardly fellow skulking to the rear during an engagement, who, on being brought to a halt by an indignant officer with the enquiry, 'You rascal, what are you falling back for? Are you wounded?' coolly replied, 'No, colonel, I can't exactly say I'm wounded, *but I'm dreadfully demoralized.*' Even this application of the word, though it be a transference of its true collective to an individual sense, may be permitted to pass as a ludicrous instance of what may come of long words, but the following extract will show its use in a still more absurd

connection. I cannot resist quoting the whole paragraph in which it occurs.

'A TIME FOR ALL THINGS.—Our townsman (says the 'Winona Republican'), Mr. Train, has just had a narrow escape from a frightful death. He started for Rushford in company with a Mr. Hanson, a merchant of that place. The two gentlemen were riding in a buggy, drawn by one horse. In the buggy there was a keg of powder, weighing twenty-five pounds, together with other small packages of light goods. Mr. Hanson was smoking his pipe. The result was that in the course of the drive the powder exploded. The horse, in addition to losing all the hair on his tail, became considerably demoralized, and ran at the top of his speed. The two men fell upon the whiffle-tree, and Mr. Hanson, to clear himself from the wreck, jumped over the wheel, falling into a mud-hole, in a half-stupefied condition. Mr. Train clung to the pieces, and was carried forward about a mile at a pretty rapid pace. On coming to a stop, he took an inventory of the concern, and found that the buggy was completely shattered: the bottom and seat entirely gone, and the reach and axles bent nearly double, so that the four wheels came almost together. Mr. Train himself had been stripped of his outer clothing, about one third of the hair on his head, and all his

whiskers burnt off, and his eyebrows and lashes gone. Yet, strange to say, he was not hurt in any other way, and after extinguishing the fire in his remaining clothing he started back to find his companion. Mr. Hanson was badly bruised, and one of his hands was severely burnt, but he had suffered no serious injury. The two contrived to get into Rushford, thankful that a worse fate had not overtaken them.'

It is rare to come on such a delicious extract as this: 'the horse, *in addition to losing all the hair on his tail, became considerably demoralized*,' is an expression which can only be equalled in *naiveté* by the statement which follows concerning Mr. Train, how, 'after being carried forward a mile *at a pretty rapid pace*,' on '*coming to a stop*, he *took an inventory* of the concern.' Who should cavil at the word demoralize being misused, if it have aided to enrich our literature by such a charming piece of characteristic prose?

CHAPTER XIV.

ON SOME DISPUTED DERIVATIONS.

Many of my readers may remember how, in the dull season half a dozen years ago (when there was little to fill the newspapers, and at a time of year when tales of monstrous gooseberries were too monstrous to be believed), the surprising linguistic talents of two ingenuous youths supplied the bored universe of British quidnuncs with a new sensation. The great spelling case of 'Ranedeer *versus* Reindeer, Raindeer *et alios*,' was opened before the bar of public opinion, and the old dusty copies of 'Johnson's Dictionary' felt an unwonted throb of life pervade their sluggish vitals. It can serve no good purpose to revive the scandal which gave rise to the discussion, but the principal attempt at fixing the true spelling of the word by its derivation was made in a letter published in the 'Times' * under the well-known signature of G. W. D., the salient points of which I here subjoin:—

* November 15, 1862.

'There can be no manner of doubt that the original spelling of the word, as we first find it in English, is *rainedeer* or *ranedeer*, but at the same time it is certain that latterly *reindeer* has been the received spelling.

'Bear with me while I try to prove these points. First, *rainedeer* or *ranedeer*. The first part of this compound word is neither a Teutonic nor a Scandinavian, but a Turanian or Lappish word. From this source it has passed into the other languages of Europe. In Ihre's Dictionary of the Northern tongues you will find under "*ren*," the Swedish form of the word, the following observations, based on the treatise *De Rangiferis*, which Peter Gran published at Upsala in 1685 :—"Lapponas animal in genere *raingo* nuncupare, et *rangiferos* speciatim ; quumque hoc unicum animantium genus sit quod illorum constituit opes, probabile est nomen hoc ab illis ad cæteras nationes dimanâsse." When and how, then, did this original form of the word, first meaning animal in general and then this kind of deer in particular, which constitutes the wealth of a nomadic race, first make its way into the English tongue ? On this point we have ample information, and, probably, no imported word in our language has so old and satisfactory a history. When King Alfred was superintending the translation of *Orosius* he worked into it all that he could

learn from travellers, and, with respect to the North of Europe, he was helped by a Northman from Helgeland, named Othere. From him the great West Saxon king first heard of Finns (Lapps) and of a kind of deer "which they call '*hranas*'" —"Tha deor hi hatath hranas." I am not aware that the word is ever found in Anglo-Saxon except in this account given by Othere, nor can I find it in English before the end of the sixteenth century, when it awoke out of its long sleep in Hakluyt's *Voyages*, published in 1599. There will be found, under the year 890, a translation of Othere's voyage, containing the following passage:—"Six hundred tame deere of that kinde which they call '*ranedeere*,'" and so on *ranedeere* in two other places, while in the marginal notes of the edition of 1599 stand "sixe hundreth *raine Deere*." It is also found in Sommer *raindeer*, and Johnson followed Sommer in this as in other things.

'This, I think, is decisive as to the way in which what may be called the *a* form of the word first came into use. It continued to prevail at least down to the time of Addison. In the *Spectator*, No. 406, will be found some very frigid amorous poetry ascribed to Ambrose Phillips, beginning—

* 'Haste, my *raindeer*, and let us nimbly go.'

'As for *reindeer*, or the *e* form, which I hold to be the true form of the word at the present day, we owe it to the Scandinavians. In these tongues the combination *ai* is seldom or never heard. At a very early period—long, in fact, before the time of Alfred—the Northmen used the form *hreinn*, the original of the *reen* or *ren* in the modern dialects. Thus we find it in the poetic *Edda*, in the *Hávamál*, the High Song, a collection of proverbial sentences and gnomic wisdom, acknowledged to be one of the oldest pieces in that venerable volume, where the poet, in the bitterness of his heart no doubt, makes the following rather ungallant comparisons, which I have freely rendered:—

'"So is't to woo a woman fair
Who flirteth in her heart,
As when an unroughed steed is driven
Along the slippery ice,
A frisky, headstrong, two-year-old
Unbroken to the yoke;
Or when against a roaring gale
One tacks in helmless ship,
Or halting tries to hold the *krein*
When hillsides thaw in spring."

'Where the last couplet runs in the original:—

"Edr skyli haltr henda
Hrein í thâfjalli."

'In later Skaldic poetry the word is quite

common, as may be seen by a reference to Egilsson's *Lexicon Poeticum*, *sub voce* "hreinn," and also in the prose dialects.'

Now, though I agree with G. W. D.'s conclusion as to this word, namely, that our modern spelling *reindeer* is the most accurate form, yet I disagree with his argument, and venture to supplement it as follows:—

That our earliest English spelling is with an *a*, I am not in a position to controvert, though this proves nothing as to correctness, when we consider how arbitrary our early English spelling is; but that it ever came from the Lappish *raingo* (a generic term for animal) seems, in spite of old Peter Gran, both irrational and unlikely.

To assign this as the derivation would make the whole word signify merely a general idea twice repeated, *raingo*, *deer* (thier) = animal—animal; let us see whether we may not discover something more clear by treating the word as radically Teutonic.

It does not even appear from G. W. D's quotation, 'Tha deor hi hatath hranas' that 'hrana' was the Lappish word at all, but rather that it was the term used by Othere the Northman in speaking to Alfred. G. W. D. admits that the word does not recur before Hakluyt, and then with the evident pronunciation *rane* instead of *raan*; he

also himself cites instances abundant of the *e* form having obtained in the Teutonic dialects.

I think, therefore, that if we can find a clear meaning conveyed to the word from a Teutonic root, the Lappish conjecture of Peter Gran may be allowed to drop.

However spelt, the word reindeer conveys to us the idea of 'a deer *made to draw* burdens.'

Let us, then, examine the word rennen (modern German), which is unquestionably cognate with the French 'renne' and German 'renn-thier.'

The following are some of its cognates: old high German, *Rennan*; Anglo-Saxon, *Rennan*; old Norse *Rennja*; Gothic, *Rinnen*. It will be observed that none of these (specially the Anglo-Saxon) have retained the *a*, which exists in the Gothic *causative* verb, 'rannyan,' to make to run, from which they all come, and from which they all have or had a *causative* meaning. See Ulphilas, Matt. v. 45, where *Rannjan* is used to translate '*maketh* (His sun) *to rise*,' and compare: 1, middle high German, Rinnen='incitato equo ferri.' (Annolied, 48); 2, mod. German, Renn-pferd, 'racehorse,' (horse made to run); 3, English, 'to *run* a horse for a race;' and 4, old Norse, *Rennja*, 'to cause to run swiftly.'

If these illustrations be applied to the case before us, we have as results the establishment of

the *e* in the spelling, and at the same time a clear explanation of the meaning of the word; Rennthier=an animal (deer) which is *caused* (or trained) *to run* (by men).

I would account as follows for what I consider the mistaken mode of spelling the word with an *a*. Persons speaking of a renn-deer would naturally ally the idea of the creature's special use with that of the manner in which it was made useful, and think the *renn* a distinctive prefix for *rein*, by which it was driven, much as we speak of 'a saddle,' or 'a harness' horse. The words rein, rane, and rain being exactly similar in sound then became confused in use whilst our orthography was unsettled, and lexicographers, ignorant of etymologies (specially Teutonic ones), perpetuated errors of men who often spelled worse than they wrote.

I will next offer a derivation for the French word 'canard,' signifying a hoax, which we had nearly naturalized in our language, when the Crimean war displaced it by introducing the word 'shave,' which came into general use I know not how. I wish I did.

I remember, when a child, hearing what professed to be 'the last speech and dying confession' of So-and-so, hawked through the streets in printed broadsheets hours before the malefactor referred to made his appearance on the scaffold; and during

the war to which I have referred, it was a common thing to hear boys in the west end of London crying, late at night, intelligence (almost always fabricated) of 'Great Battle!' 'Glorious Victory!' or 'Sebastopol taken!' as the case might be. Now, the following extracts from Champfleury* will show us exactly how the word 'canard' expresses this very idea. I must premise that 'canard,' 'duck,' is the technical French (or rather Dijonnais) name of coarse grey paper, on which broadsheets and ballads are printed, probably from its roughness resembling a duck's skin; in the same way as we talk of a chill turning us to gooseskin, or, as our old friend Horace says—

> 'Jam jam residunt cruribus asperæ
> Pelles, et album mutor in alitem
> Superne.'

With so much of preface, the extracts speak for themselves.

'Un imprimeur dijonnais voulut faire un traité avec Guenillon pour exploiter les condamnés à mort, sous forme de complainte. Guenillon refusa: il vendait bien les relations de brigands fameux et impossibles, de serpents monstreux qui étalaient leurs sonnettes fabuleuses sur la moitié d'une grande feuille de papier gris, dit *canard*;

* L'Usurier Blaizot, chap. iv.

mais par un sentiment qu'il est bon d'honorer, il ne consentait jamais à chanter les "*dernières paroles du condamné*, ses malheurs, ses repentirs, ses aveux."

'L'hiver, Guenillon composait des chansons . . . . Aux premiers beaux jours, il se remettait bravement en route, le sac au dos, des rames de *canards* dans le sac, et il allait enchanter les oreilles de ses compatristes.'

Our dictionary-makers, for the most part, have given us an unsatisfactory derivation of the word *quagmire*, referring it to the word *quake*, to tremble, shake. It properly means a moving bog, and its original form is *quick-mire*, just as *quick-sand* signifies a shifting sandbank. We find the word in this form in 'Piers Plowman's Crede,' line 226,* where the fat friar is described—

'All wagged his fleche as a quyk mire.'

Again, we have little help given to ascertain the derivation of the word *flunkey*, though it has provided us with two new substantives, and at least one new adjective, namely, flunkeyism, flunkeydom, and flunkeyish. The word means a livery servant, as we all know, but yet with a sort of contemptuous signification attached to it. A conjecture or

* Skeats' edition for Early English Text Society. Trübner, 1867.

two may be hazarded as to its derivation, seeing that the dictionaries leave it unexplained.

In the first place, the French word 'flanqueur' might give a sort of solution to the question. It means one who fights on the flank, a skirmisher.

Hence, it may very well have come to signify an escort in general, and so a footman, or number of such, accompanying a carriage. Of course the word *flank* in this sense would be the root of the expression. Another solution seems less probable, but, as we are upon conjecturing, I insert it for as much as it is worth. It is this, that it is a name of ridicule given from the epaulettes or wings formerly, and still occasionally, worn by footmen on their shoulders; the word *flunk* being the low German term for the high German *flügel*, a wing. This might bring us back again to the military sense through the word *fugleman*, properly *flügelman*, literally a 'wing-man,' who takes distance on the wings of a regiment in order to give a line for dressing the ranks, somewhat the office also of footmen in clearing the way for their masters through a crowd.

The derivation of a kindred term, *lackey*, is also a matter which has given rise to much dispute, and is not yet satisfactorily settled. Its first known use however supports the view of *flunkey* being a military term, derived from either 'flanquer,' to

flank, or '*flünk*' for '*flügel*,' a wing, since *lackey*, in French, primarily signified a foot-soldier. Froissart, quoted by Menage, actually fixes the time when the word came into the language in that sense as being about the year 1300. A derivation for it has been attempted by several writers; some have tried to dig it out of the Arabic *lakia*, *dirty* (just as wisely as a contributor to 'Notes and Queries' lately told us that *brat* was derived from a Polish word signifying *brother*, and as a profound correspondent of 'Public Opinion,' Oct. 26, 1868, gravely derives the slang word 'codger' from the verb 'cogitate'!) Diez has done his best to prove its origin from the old Provençal *lecai*, *dainty* (comp. Germ. *lecker* in same sense), and shows how this word can convey the sense of parasitic, very appropriate to our use nowadays of the words lackey and flunkey; but of all the absurd conjectures on the subject, I may give that of Menage as a deterrent example to synthetically disposed etymologists. He pitched upon the Latin word 'verna,' a slave (as his origin for *laquais*), and proceeded thus to build up his theory. *Verna* had a diminutive, *vernula*; having got hold of this, who could object to his imagining *vernula* to have formed a word *vernulacus*, and if this were done without obstruction, could anyone be silly enough to censure his making that into another word still

vernulacaius? 'Here,' says Scheler, 'he paused to take breath; then, summoning up all his courage, he seized his elaborated word and cut it in two; the first part he simply threw away; and the second remained, *lacaius*, 'which all men must be idiots not to recognise as identical with *laquais !!*'

After this it would be presumption indeed to hazard a conjecture on the subject; but I will, in its place, venture to point out a curious analogy. The nearest word we can find in form and sound to *lackey* or *laquais* is the Latin *laqueus*, a rope with a slip knot, and especially a noose used for hanging. The contemptuous meaning which the word lackey has conveys almost always the idea of a rogue, and if we find, in various languages, a rogue designated by a word signifying a gallows rope, we may think laqueus as close a derivation as we are likely to get for lackey.

In French, we have *filou*, signifying a rogue; nor is at all clearly proved that our own word *filch*, is not derived from it, or that our other word *fellow*, in a contemptuous sense (as often applied also to a servant), does not own the same origin. This French word, *filou*, is paralleled by the earlier middle Latin term, *filo* (*filonis*) in the sense of *nebulo*, a rogue. The connection of both words with the Latin *filum* and the French *fil*, *thread*, is obvious. In German, again, we have not only the word *strick*

(rope, cord) and *strang* (string), signifying a rogue or scamp,* but the word *schlingel*, from *schlinge*, a *noose*, is applied in exactly the same way.

This reference to hanging we find fortified still further by the word '*pendard*' in French, and the English word 'slipstring' used by Beaumont and Fletcher to signify one whom luck alone enabled to escape the gallows.

Before parting with the words *flunkey* and *lackey*, I may offer a reason why they should both have been applied primarily to soldiers, and secondarily to servants; and another, why they both retain a contemptuous signification. In the first place, in ancient feudal times all servants were, when need called, practically soldiers; all were at their master's beck and call, and he was bound to bring them to *his* master's wars when duly summoned; and that names of contempt should fall to the lot of men engaged in war is easily understood when we consider what the soldiers of the middle ages were, how brutal, unprincipled, and mercenary, and that even the very name of *soldier* was in its first use as much a reproach as the word *mercenary*

* See Weigand; Synonymen, No. 1719. 'As both *strick* and *strang* were used to bind and to hang malefactors, the words have often been used in reference to this fact, so much so that the word *strick* is a common epithet for a dissipated, good-for-nothing fellow.'

is in our own time, and marked the degrading difference which lies between the warrior—the free man—fighting in just quarrel for his prince and country, and the hireling cut-throat who sells his butcher's service, for mere bread and booty, to the highest bidder.

There is something very delicious in the simple way some people use of setting the world right on etymological, as well as other subjects. I remember three dear old maiden ladies once being very indignant with a brother of mine who, having shot for his first season, refused to accept their dictum to the effect that a fowling-piece was discharged by a light being put down the muzzle; and I remember, as a boy, reading in a provincial paper that kissing was invented by the Mahometans, in order to ascertain, by the sense of smell, whether their wives had been committing the crime of drinking wine (though it struck my childish memory that kissing was mentioned in the book of Genesis ages before Mahomet was ever heard of). But I can beat the simple-minded positiveness of two such marvellous statements by the following sublime discovery of a writer in the 'Public Opinion' of May 2, 1868. It is meant to set us all right as to the origin of the word News, and to most readers must have been news with a vengeance. I subjoin

the passage, which is certainly striking, if not altogether conclusive.

'News.—The word *news* is not, as many imagine, derived from the adjective *new*. In former times (between the years 1595 and 1730) it was a prevalent practice to put over the periodical publications of the day the initial letters of the compass, thus—

N
E + W
S

importing that these papers contained intelligence from the four quarters of the globe; and from this practice is derived the term "newspaper."'

How delightfully is the statement put. 'The word is not, *as many imagine*, derived from the adjective *new*.' And what a condescending definition we are given of when 'former times' existed, namely, from 1595 till 1730. We might, were we disposed to be captious, feel inclined to enquire what 'the periodical publications of the day' were in 1595; but if the discoverer be right there must have been 'periodical publications of the day' long before then, since the word *news*, in its present form, and that of *newes*, occurs far earlier in our literature. Here is a sentence from 'Hugh Rhodes' Boke of Nurture, imprinted at London, 1577,' which gives the following advice as to servants: 'If they be

tale-tellers or *newes* caryers reproue them sharpely, and if they will not learne nor amende avoyde them thy house, for it is a great quyetnesse to have people of good behaviour in a house.' And not to mention the name of such a writer as Lord Berners, whose translation of Froissart was published in 1523, whose grave was dug long before 'former times' began in 1595, and who yet made use of the word 'news'—what sort of guidance, other than a *diametrically* wrong one, can we expect from a writer, who, merely to support his preposterous theory, actually makes the East and West change places on his compass card?

My readers will have much mistaken the temper in which this little book has been written, if they think my ridicule of this absurd derivation a mere matter of spite or malice. I dare say I make as many mistakes as most men, and need as much of my readers' patience as any; but it is surely right to knock such nonsense as is here propounded on the head at once, as tending to throw discredit on one of the most interesting pursuits with which our leisure can be occupied.

It may, however, be expected that, after this tirade against the wrong, I should be prepared with the right conjecture; and, indeed, it is desirable to offer a remark upon the word in question, as its form seems to have misled many, and amongst

them even one of our most popular writers on the subject of words. Dean Alford, in his entertaining work, 'The Queen's English,' treats the word 'news' as a plural form, though quite correctly stating that it requires a verb in the singular number. Now, the fact is, that though the word ends with an *s* it is in the singular, and is strictly analogous to the German neuter adjective employed as a substantive, *Neues*, 'a new thing.' 'Es gibt Nichts Neues,' 'there is nothing of new —there is no news' is an every day phrase; and our early form of the word *newes* is exactly the same, with the only difference of being spelt, as the nature of our language requires, with the double instead of the single *u*. So that to use the expression 'what *is* the news?' with the verb in the singular, is no concession to the custom of our speech, but a mere following of the due grammatical canon of the language.

As a pleasing contrast with the specimen of ignorant assumption we have been considering, I subjoin here a passage from the 'Athenæum,' giving a very ingenious theory of derivation for the word *regret*, which may be right or wrong, but in any case has some reasonable grounds of scholarship to support it, and is not set forth as a mere wild and random conjecture :—

'A new derivation of *regret* has been proposed

by M. Chavée. The old derivations were—1. The Latin *requiritari*, the frequentative of *queri*, to complain, the *qu* passing into *g*, as in the old French *fregunder*, from *frequentare*. 2. That proposed by Mahn, the Latin *gratum*, whence the Portuguese *grado*, Provençal *grat*, French *gret*, *gré*, substantives; and the Italian *aggrandare*, French *agréer*, from which a supposed Provençal *regredar* might be found. 3. Mätzner's Gothic *greten*, Anglo-Saxon *graetan*, to greet, weep. All these, as well as the etymologies of Ménage and Le Duchat, are wrong (says M. Chavée), because the writers have missed the primary meaning of the word. This the Wallon has preserved, and it is 'a re-growth, a fresh shoot,' an image borrowed from vegetable life. *Li r'gret d'on mau*, le regret d'un mal, is the return, or fresh access, of a malady which has not been felt for some time. Again,

> 'On a todis des regrets
> D'on mau do moeis d'maiye,'

people always have returns of an illness taken in the month of May. *Regret* is here the Latin *recretum*, that which grows again, which makes a new shoot, is re-born. The change from the Latin *c* to the French *g* is paralleled by the Old French *segret*, now *secret*, from the Latin *secretum*; while the metaphor is plainly seen in the Italian 'Mi rincresce lo spiacervi,' I regret having displeased you; though here *re*

is prefixed to the compound *increscere*, instead of the simple verb *crescere*, as in 'regret.'

Of course there are difficulties in the way of our accepting the new derivation, and ousting the old ones, of the word. Firstly, our own expression is 'regret *for*' not 'regret *of*' something that is past; but a still stronger objection is this, that if we adopt M. Chavée's view, we should expect to find the word used not merely for a re-access of pain and sorrow, but also for one of joy and gladness, which is quite contrary to any received sense of the word. The Italian illustration, however, given above, is nearly sufficient to outweigh these objections, and certainly makes M. Chavée's theory respectable, if not conclusive.

CHAPTER XV.

DERIVATIONS (*continued*).

It does not occur to many people to enquire into the meaning of such a common verb as to *ring*, applied to a bell; nor on enquiry does it at first seem easy to discover an origin for the word. In this sense it does not occur in languages cognate with our own, and yet it is so universally used as a synonym for an acute vibration of sound that it may seem hard to admit the fact of its being of very secondary origin. I will first give the explanations hitherto offered for the word, if only to show once more how nearly right etymologists may be and yet miss the mark, and even how they may be unconsciously right without understanding clearly how or why. This is the derivation given by Richardson, in which he is followed by Webster and others:—

'Ring, v. from Anglo-Saxon *ring-an*, *hringan*; Dutch, *ringhen*; Swedish, *ringa*; *pulsare*, to beat.

Lye suggests from *ring*, *annulus*, as applied to a metallic instrument of music of that circular form, and which, when beaten, returned *argutum et stre-perum sonum*.'

Now though the truth be, that in all probability the 'instrument of music of that circular form' never existed save in Lye's imagination, and that, knowing of such an instrument as a triangle, he evolved from analogy a possible (and *therefore* probable, for nothing possible is improbable to a thorough word grubber) musical ring, still I feel tolerably certain that the derivation from ring (annulus) is perfectly right. Lye should have acted on the system laid down by the old judge in advising a young one,—'Give your judgment, but don't give your reasons; the judgment may be right, the reasons are pretty sure to be wrong;' and then none could complain of his derivation. But the fact is, the roots offered (or rather, the root, for there is but one) do not bear the signification of *beat*, *pulsare*, at all; their meaning is that of *wrestle*, *luctari*, which sense is still retained in our word to *wring*, spelt with a *w*, in strict accordance with the true Anglo-Saxon form, which is cavalierly ignored in Richardson.

But how am I to reconcile my hint that Richardson was nearly right in giving a sense (not an etymology) equivalent to *beating*, with my

other hint that Lye was right without knowing it in deriving the word from the substantive *ring*? Why, thus: the word is taken from the *shape* of the ancient door-handle, which was a knocker in itself, formed in the most simple way in the form of a ring, a form which, however modified, is common to our own day. In ancient times the legend 'knock and ring' on a hall door would have been a glaring pleonasm, for the two processes were identical. It was only after the use of door-bells was introduced that they became distinct, up to which time the knocker itself was indeed a *bell*, but not in the metallic sense we now assign to it. The original meaning of *bell* is the barking of a dog, and hence came to be given to any other succession of sharp sudden sounds on a single note, such as either knocking at a door or the sounding of a bell. Our word *clap* has exactly the same origin (still observable in the German words *bellen* and *klaffen*, signifying the barking of dogs), and we may do well to note, in passing, the analogy between a *bell* and the *clapper* or tongue which makes it sound. Thus Gower says ('Confessio Amantis,' B. I.),—

> 'There maie nothing his tonge daunt,
> That he ne *clappeth* as a *belle*,
> Wherof if thou wolt that I telle
> It is behouely for to here.'

We may go still further with analogies, which, though they may not absolutely prove, at all events can support the theory that our use of the word *ring* as applied to *sound* is taken originally from the noise made with a door-handle or ring to attract attention to the person making it. The simplest *door-handle*, *knocker*, and *latch* were all combined in a single *ring*; the sound produced was in character similar to the barking of a dog, and took the name of *bell* from that fact; the *clink* of a bell (a word which we might imagine formed by onomatopœia) is the English and German *klinke*,* a *door-latch*; and the word *knell*, which we associate at present only with actual metallic bells, is the German word *knall*, a detonation, a sudden *clap*, an expression most appropriate in times when in the West, as still in the East, worshippers were called to prayer by the *knocking* of mallets upon wood. Once more, we have the *bobbin* (French *bobine*) applied to the latch-handle of a door, as we know from poor Riding Hood's grandmother telling the wolf to 'pull the bobbin,

* 'Well heard Kiddie all this sore constraint,
And longed to know the cause of his complaint;
Then creeping close, behind the wicket's *clinke*
Privily he peeped out through a chinke;
Yet not so privily but the fox him spied,
For deceitful meaning is double-eyed.'
Chaucer Shepherd's Calendar, *May*.

and the latch will go up ;' and we may put side by side with it the otherwise inexplicable term used in bell ringing, 'a triple *bob* major.'

But before we leave this subject I must call attention to two statements on this point needing some explanation. The one is that the *introduction* of door-bells caused a distinction between knocking and ringing at a door. For it may be said, bells were used in the time of the early Jews as parts of dress, and familiar to many nations before the English language was ever formed. And this is perfectly true, but *door-bells* were not known, and for a very good reason. English houses were builded of one story, without even a basement (which was of fourteenth century introduction), and the different portions of a house had different doors opening on a courtyard, so that admission could always be obtained by knocking at the door when people wished to enter, without the necessity of communication with persons at a distance. Evidence may also be required to justify my other statement that the door-ring was used a a knocker or bell, and I therefore adduce the following remarkable illustration from Bürger's well-known ballad of 'Leonora :'—

'Und aussen, horch ! ging's trap, trap, trap,
Als wie von Rosses Hufen,

'Und klirrend stieg ein Reiter ab
An des Geländers Stufen;
Und horch! und horch! der *Pfortenring*
Ganz lose, leise, klinglingling.'

If my kind readers are not tired of my *ringing* so many changes on the word and its analogies, they will bear with me while I lead them a little further by another illustration. I have said that *bellen* and *klaffen* (middle low German, *clappen*) both mean to bark. Let us now take the word *clapdish*,* a sort of rattle, which lazars infected with leprosy were obliged to use to keep off strangers from contagion; and see by this quotation from 'Verholen Minne' that this was also spoken of as a *bell*. Here are the lines :—

'Die dagelijks min willetje doen
En *klinken* de lazerus *bellen*.'

One more evidence of the early identity of knocking and ringing may be supplied by the origin *pello*, I beat, for a *peal* of bells. Compare Terence, Adelphi, 5, 3, 2—'Quisnam a me pepulit tam graviter fores?'

* 'And when trimmed up
To the height, as thou imaginest, in mine eyes,
A leper with a clapdish (to give notice
He is infectious) in respect to thee
Appears a young Adonis.'
Massinger, Parliament of Love, *Act ii. scene* 2.

Enough, however, of speculation on a matter which however interesting as a conjecture, I do not pretend to consider capable of any perfect proof.

Have we got in the dictionaries the right derivation for the word *jumble*? I think not. Richardson says, 'Perhaps from the French *combler* (Lat. cumulare), *to heap up*, to throw up in a heap or mass; or rather a diminutive of *jump*. Chaucer writes *jombre*, and Sir T. More *jumper*; the one equivalent to *jumble*, the other to *jump*, &c.' I suspect the origin of the word is to be found in the Italian *giumella*, what can be grasped in two hands, the natural course adopted for the hasty and untidy removal of a number of objects together.

Some writers, again, give themselves much trouble about the word *awkward*, which, indeed, to be consistent with itself, should not be of the most obvious origin. It has been interpreted as equivalent to a *waywa:d*, which certainly is an *out-of-the way*, (not to say, as a punster would, a wayward) derivation. Richardson offers the following etymology and definition:—'If *awk* be not a corruption, its origin may be deduced from the Dutch, *aver-recht* (contrarius recto: præter rectum); thus, *aver-recht*, *aurrecht*, *aurcht*, *aurc*, *awk*, or *awk*, to which add the termination *ward*, and awkward

will mean "looking from the right." If *awkward* be the proper simple term, it may be the Anglo-Saxon *Acyrred* (*ac-yrred*), past participle of the verb *Acyrren*, to turn; and thus mean *turned*, *averted*.'

His definition is better than his etymology, 'Turned out of the right or straight line, perverted or perverse, indirect; crooked, clumsy, inelegant.'

Is it not more simple to deduce it from the Anglo-Saxon *ecg*, edge, akin to which we have the German *eck*, a *corner*, and interpret the word as meaning *edgeways*, *diagonal*, and so *awkward*, in the sense in which we can apply the term, for instance, to the motion of a crab?

This very same sense, I may observe in passing, is the proper one of our word *queer*, which we use in a different sense altogether from *cross*, a term in some respects its synonym.

I suspect that the word *sterling* has a double derivation, according to the sense in which it is taken. The expression 'pounds sterling' is fully explained by the often quoted passages from Holinshed and Camden, showing how the money of German merchants (called Easterlings from their geographical relation to England), being unusually pure, was made the standard for English coinage. But the other sense in which we use it, that of unflinching, resolute, uncompromising, may have a more direct origin than a figurative appli-

cation of the currency idea points to. It may come from, or be cognate with, the old high German *sturilinc*, a (young) warrior; a word which certainly passed into the French tongue as a synonym for a brave combatant, as appears from the following quotation cited by Diezt from Girart de Rossilho,—

'Acqi moro a glai tant *esturlenc*
E tan noble vassal i adelenc.'

Etiquette, again, is a word which has come no less than twice into our language. The word originally signifies a pointed *stick*, just such, no doubt, as a gardener may fix in a flower-pot, after writing upon it some singularly distorted botanical name. We have but to replace the old French *s* before the first *t* in the word to see how closely cognate *estiquette* is with *stick* (in fact, the word in multitudinous forms pervades all the Romanic and Teutonic languages). From this first meaning it came in the form of *ticket* to signify the same thing as *label* (a word whose derivation I have already treated), and has been for ages naturalized among us in this form. But it has entered our language a second time, in its French shape, *etiquette*, to express another idea, namely, that of accordance with polished manners and behaviour, and in this sense entirely disowns connection with its former self, *ticket*. A lady or gentleman may say 'that's not etiquette' without exciting remark; but to

say 'that's not the ticket,' used, at least in unslangy days, to be considered as an irredeemable vulgarism. Cowper, however, in the third book of the 'Task,' uses the English form of the word in the French sense, so far as it refers to the gaining of admission into society :—

> 'Well dressed, well bred,
> Well equipaged, is *ticket* good enough
> To pass us readily through every door.'

We may mark an analogy to the French *etiquette* (so far as both terms refer to the making up of a parcel) in the French word *cachet*, a seal, used in such a phrase as 'ça n'a pas du cachet,' 'there's no *style* about it:' a metaphor which we use ourselves, though in less concise expression, when we speak, for instance, of a person's manners bearing the *stamp* of good breeding.

The almost universal mistake made as to the derivation of the word *clew* (commonly spelt *clue*) gives us a curious example of the natural tendency of etymologists to seek a root for a term not according to its structure, but according to their idea of its sense. Our common notion of a clue is a thread, by following which a person is enabled to find his way in safety through a maze or labyrinth. The earliest notion of it is suggested to us all, as children, by the legend of Queen Eleanor and Fair

Rosamond. Who has not, as a child, pictured to himself the angry queen threading her way through the maze which surrounded the bower of the doomed beauty, and thought how happy it would have been if the thread had broken in her hand, and left her, mazed and lost, unable to complete her fell design? It seems so natural to associate the word clue with thread, that most people would immediately accept the derivation supplied by our principal dictionary-makers, and believe the word derived from 'Saxon, *cleow*, *clive*; Dutch, *klowen*; Latin, *globus*.'

'The word signifies a ball or a lump. . . . Hence—1. A ball *of thread*; 2. The thread that forms a ball; 3. The thread that is used to guide a person in a labyrinth.' This is Webster's treatment, amplified from Richardson. But how far-fetched such a derivation is we may easily see by reflecting that, *as a ball*, the thread could never form a guide, that only when the form of the ball was utterly lost could the present sense apply to the thread, which might have formed the ball before it was unwound. The very spelling of the word, which these writers have correctly given as *clew*, instead of *clue*, might have led them to think of a simpler origin. The word is, in fact, the French *clef*, a key, from the Latin *clavis*, as becomes still more clearly apparent if we keep in mind

that our modern *w* used to have the force of *v*, a fact which, by the way, may also show that our old friend, Sam Weller, in saying 'Villiam' for 'William,' was speaking in an ancient and decayed idiom, rather than in a late corruption of our modern tongue.

The derivation of the word *blaze* is a matter of difficulty. So far as the sense of *flame* is concerned, the German word *blasen*, to blow, is offered, pointing to the Anglo-Saxon *blœsan*, as a reasonable origin; but then we must remember that the German and kindred languages do not use it at all in this sense. It seems more reasonable to refer it to the same root as the German *blass*, pale, of light colour; which will explain all the senses in which we use it. So a 'blaze' in a horse's forehead (German *Blässe*) means a patch of white; so, again, we speak of blazing a tree—that is, striking off a slice of bark as a mark, leaving of course a light patch where the bark was removed.*

We often find that the acceptance of an erroneous origin for a word will actually cause a misconception and even a misspelling of its proper form. Thus the dictionary words *Bat-fowler*, *Bat-*

* It might be worth while to consider whether this sense of decortication might not suggest a better derivation for the French word *blesser*, to wound, than the unsatisfactory surmises which have hitherto been made by etymologists.

fowling have arisen, though I feel sure the practice throughout England is universally called *Bat-folding*. It sounds reasonable enough to call any system of catching birds *fowling*, and there would be a natural impulse on the part of a man of education (who had never witnessed the process) to say that the netting of birds at night should be called Bat-fowling, rather than Bat-folding. Two difficulties, however, stand in his way. Firstly, the process is universally called by the latter term; and secondly, though he might account for the *fowling*, the *bat** would be hard to explain, except on the supposition that the fowlers sometimes caught a bat, or on the theory that because bats fly by night every other creature flying, or made to fly by night, partook in some sort of their nature. The accuracy, however, of the expression *bat-folding* becomes obvious when we regard the instrument with which it is accomplished. This is a net stretched upon a rude frame, consisting of two parts which, when opened out, are about of the same shape as a large paper kite or as a gigantic racket, or *bat*, and is hinged at the top, the ends at the bottom being in the operator's hands. It is laid open against an ivy-grown wall or tree, the noise caused by which proceeding rouses the birds from their roosting places,

* The suggestion that the word should be *bird-fowling* is, of course, refuted by its pleonastic form.

and the net being then closed or *folded*, the victims are caught in its meshes. If my readers dislike this origin of the word *bat* they may refer it, if they choose, to the folding of wing practised by the whole bat tribe.

I shall conclude by giving the derivations of two words, which seem to me to have been hitherto mistaken, and which, as belonging to our present subject, I venture to repeat here from an article on Minute English Etymology, contributed by me to the 'Contemporary Review' for July, 1867. The words in question are *laudanum* and *saunter*.

As to the first, its origin has given rise to many conjectures. One of our latest writers has referred it to *anodyne*, considering it a corrupt Latinised form of the Greek *νώδυνον*, an imagined neuter adjective from *νωδυνία*, absence of pain. I have also known an ingenious effort to derive the word from the verb *λήγειν*, in a causative sense, to make to cease, and *ὀδύνη*, pain, which would be a better explanation of the nature and effect of laudanum than the other; but, after all, the best to be said for either of these conjectures (for they are nothing more) is, that they are not so preposterous as that pitched on by Webster, who derives *laudanum* from *laudandum*, as meriting praise.*

* It is fair to say that this conjecture has been expunged in the last edition of Webster's Dictionary.

Now the fact is that the form *laudanum* never was Latin at all, corrupt or pure ; but *ledanum* and *ladanum* are both used by Pliny, the latter in the passage ' ladano sistitur alvus,' showing one of the main modern employments of tincture of opium to be assigned to what was called ladanum in his day. He further describes the nature of the extract, and the origin of the word, as both coming from the Greek word λῆδον, a shrub growing in Cyprus, from which *ledanum* was made. He explains his use of the form *ladanum*, by stating that the shrub was called *lada* by a barbarism, ' ladam vocant talem barbaro nomine.' The plant was, in fact, as Livy shows, the gum cistus (*Cistus Creticus*). Now every gum at one time was called a *balsam* or *balm*, which word, by figurative use, has come to bear the general meaning of *anodyne*. The tincture of opium in process of time having become possibly the most effectual, certainly the most general sedative, usurped to itself first the office, and then the name of one particular sedative, much in the same way as, in English and German, the word *tea* has, within the last couple of centuries, arbitrarily taken the place of *decoction*, as in the forms *beef tea*, *Camillenthee*, &c. Pliny was content to go back to the Greek form, thinking any other a simple barbarism ; but it is interesting to note that the Greek λῆδον was but a softening,

after all, of the Persian form *lâdan*, the long *a* in which resumed its rightful place in the Latin word, not by barbaric error, but by true linguistic instinct.

With regard to the word *saunter*, I must point the attention of some of my readers to the peculiar force of the letter *s*, as a prefix to many English words. It is an intensive and protractive prefix, and a few instances of its effect may be interesting.

Thus s-melt, s-mash, s-lack, s-lush, s-weat, s-nip are intensifications of melt, mash, lax, lush, wet, and nip; s-neeze, s-narl, and s-nore, display the same sort of relation to English *nose*, and Latin *nar*, nostril; and a vast number of less obvious instances may be found on reference to an English vocabulary by anyone whom the subject may interest. The knowledge that such a force exists in a single prefixed letter is in itself a suggestion of help to an enquirer puzzled, let us say, to discover the etymology of any word beginning with *s*. Let us, then, with this much of preface, explain the word 'saunter' by the use of this plain principle. It may be worth while to show the explanations already offered of the term, all of them doubtless plausible, but all at the same time merely conjectural, and resting upon no sort of philological or historical evidence. Skinner derives it from French *sauter*, to leap; explaining our sense of

saunter by the cognate word *desultory*. The error of this view is evident from the consideration that the arbitrary *n* in the middle of the word must thus be left entirely unaccounted for. Thomson invents a low Latin form, *segnitare*, which is ingenious, but nothing more. Others refer it to the French *sans terre*, landless, an interpretation which only explains the sound, not the sense of the word. Archbishop Trench, following an idea mentioned by Lye, says:—

"'Saunterer,' derived from 'la Sainte Terre,' is one who visits the Holy Land. At first a deep and holy enthusiasm drew men thither. . . . By degrees, however, as the enthusiasm spent itself, the making of this pilgrimage degenerated into a mere worldly fashion, and every idler that liked strolling about better than performing the duties of his calling, assumed the Pilgrim's staff, and proclaimed himself bound for the Holy Land; to which very often he never set out. And thus the word forfeited the more honourable meaning it may have once possessed, and the 'saunterer' came to signify one idly and unprofitably wasting his time loitering here and there, with no fixed purpose or aim.

This, in its turn, is a picturesque derivation; but if such a term ever became proverbial, we should be justified in expecting to find something analogous to our word in its natural language, the French, where nothing of the kind exists.

* Trench on the Study of Words, p. 57.

But if we assign to the first letter *s* of the word 'saunter' its natural protractive force as a prefix, we come to the true origin of the term. We have the word *aunter* left us, which is the early English form of our word *adventure*, both as verb and substantive. Thus we have the old metrical romance, 'The Anturs of Arthur at the Tarne Wathelan;' and we find the verb form used by Chaucer in the Reeve's Tale, v. 4208:—

> 'And when this jape is tald another day,
> I shal be halden a daffe or a cokenay;
> I wol arise and *auntre* it by my fay.'

So, again, we find this sense of the word illustrated by the context in Hudibras (pt. iii. c. 1), where it is applied to an equestrian:—

> 'By *sauntering* still on some *adventure*,
> And growing to thy horse a centaur.

Thus, to saunter is to go about waiting for adventures, denoting the Micawber-like expectation of some indefinite thing 'turning up,' and has come with special fitness to be applied to the listless, unbraced, purposeless lounging of the idle man, who, without the energy to seek excitement, is content to hang like a half-dead worm, a bait for chance currents to toss, for circumstances to nibble at, too often for mischief to seize upon, as he

abandons himself, in the full sense of the word, *ad ventura*, to the things that come to him, or good or bad, whatsoever they may be, without an effort or a care to meet and match events as he was placed upon this earth to do.

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